# JOHN FORSTER AS A CRITIC OF FICTION

by

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TO JOAN
and
MY PARENTS

## SUMMARY

This thesis primarily evaluates John Forster as a critic of fiction. To this end, it examines not only his reviews of fiction (most of which are found in the Examiner), but also his literary relationships with Thackeray, Bulwer-Lytton, Mrs. Gaskell, Dickens, and with a number of minor novelists— writers of Newgate and social novels.

The first steps were to collect his reviews from the Examiner, and— more difficult —to attempt to ascribe them as judiciously as possible. One of the major contributions of this thesis, therefore, is the ascription of many of these reviews, and the identification of another major reviewer of Dickens's fiction.

As I have pointed out from time to time, Forster's reviews show that his critical views, throughout his literary career, tended to be those of the latter half of the eighteenth century. This was largely due to his early friendships with such people as Hunt, Lamb, and Landor, as well as to his Unitarian upbringing and outlook. But no doubt it was also due, in an undefinable way, to his own basic temperament. Thus we find him, throughout his reviewing in the Examiner, praising a novel for its healthy sentiment, its quiet humour, its entertainment value, its realism, and especially for its social comment and moral balance.

In view of all this, it is easy to see why Forster should have been so enthusiastic about Mrs. Gaskell's

writing-- in particular about Cranford and Ruth. Conversely, it is equally easy to understand why Forster should have sincerely disliked Vanity Fair and Pendennis, regardless of personal differences between Thackeray and himself.

It is also quite reasonable to suppose that Forster found in the early Dickens, the same qualities that he had approved of in the early novels of Lytton, or was to find in those of Mrs. Gaskell. It is also reasonable to suppose that he disapproved of the later Dickens (after Bleak House)for much the same reason-- though not to the same extent --as he did of Thackeray's later writing. All evidence, as I have frequently tried to indicate in this thesis, points to this being the case.

In some ways, each chapter in this thesis stands alone, but collectively they all progressively present a clearer picture of Forster, who with all his critical short-comings, appears as a sensible, competent, and a sound critic.

CONTENTS

# PREFACE

This thesis concentrates on Forster's career as a critic of fiction on the Examiner, largely excluding his general biography except where it throws light on his reviewing. Nevertheless, I have attempted a brief outline (pp.ix-xii) giving some biographical details of his crowded life, regretting at the same time, that neither the outline, nor this thesis can hope to give more than just an impression of the full extent of his involvement with literature. For the truth is, that Forster's reviewing in the Examiner was only one aspect of a life that was so fully committed to letters. Yet, it was the aspect to which he gave most of his time from 1834 to the close of 1855, and to which he owed the best part of his public reputation.

Now, because Forster wrote notices in the Examiner for over twenty years, it has hardly been possible to examine in any detail his attitude towards the works of each novelist writing during those years. It has seemed best, therefore, to select for examination, his reviews of the fiction of a number of representative novelists: Thackeray, Bulwer-Lytton, Mrs. Gaskell, Dickens, and a number of minor writers of social novels. By examining his notices of their works, we can form a fairly clear picture of some of his critical views of the novel in general. Further, I have taken the novelists in the order that I have, not only because I feel that this is the most convenient one for the gradual revelation of his critical principles about fiction, but also because I feel that in this order, it makes for a more interesting reading of the thesis as a whole.

One of my chief problems throughout this rather panoramic study, has been in detailing the evidence for the ascription of each notice, without clogging the narrative. Thus, I have only gone into some detail about the reasons for my deciding on a particular ascription when it has seemed necessary. In other instances where no key point is at issue, I have usually merely indicated only the possibility or probability of a particular authorship. I believe that I have been cautious and reasonable in making ascriptions, but there are bound to be some misjudgments. Yet, when in doubt, I have usually based any major points I have wished to make about Forster's critical views, on a number of reviews, rather than on just one.

Another problem was in deciding exactly how to refer to a particular critical account— whether as a "review" or as a "notice". Compared with critical accounts in Blackwood's or in the Edinburgh Review, for example, the majority of the accounts in the Examiner appear very slight indeed, and there might seem to be a justification for terming them all "notices" in making such a comparison. However, with the accounts in the Examiner, there is often a clear intention to emphasise a critical point of view, as well as on other occasions, almost solely to draw attention to a new publication. Yet because there are usually too many variables to form crisp definitions, I have used the various terms ("critique", "notice", "review", and "account") synonymously, throughout this thesis.

Finally, I have placed two discoveries that came to

light in the course of this study in appendices. So Appendix B chiefly features the part that Forster played in preparing each monthly issue of Dickens's Household Narrative of Current Events, and Appendix C features an interesting review of Jack Sheppard, with certain conclusions. These appendices did not conveniently fit into the main fabric of the thesis, yet they are closely connected with its subject. Other appendices concern Thackeray's writing for the Examiner; a comparative account of the Life[1] accounts of Oliver Twist and Nicholas Nickleby with the accounts in the Examiner and elsewhere; a listing of the notices in the Examiner used in the composition of the critical comments in the Life; and some notes on the ascription of the reviews (in the Examiner) of Dickens's works.

* * *

My debt to Professor K. J. Fielding for what is of value in this thesis is particularly difficult to acknowledge. It is not only what I have learned about researching techniques over almost five years of close and interested supervision through two theses, but also what he has conveyed to me through his own work and attitude, about the integrity, enthusiasm, and imagination, that go into creative research. I am grateful to him also for his many kindnesses, for his ready availability, and for his patience and sympathetic encouragement.

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[1] References throughout this thesis are to the Everyman edition of Forster's Life of Charles Dickens, reprinted with new material by A. J. Hoppé (1966). Such reference is listed by book, chapter and page.

My thanks is due also to the Birmingham Public Library for the extensive use of their run of the Examiner; to the Inter-Library Loan department of the University of Edinburgh for arranging the transfer of individual volumes so promptly; and to Mr. J.Armstrong, who spent many hours over a period of four years xeroxing from them.

Finally, I am also grateful to the Canada Council for its financial and moral support, without which it may not have been possible for me to have completed this thesis.

## BIOGRAPHICAL TABLE[1]

(1812 - 1876)

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| 1812 | 2 Apr | Born at Newcastle |
| ?1817-28 | | At Newcastle Grammar School |
| 1827 | Jun | "A Few Thoughts in Vindication of the Stage" published |
| 1828 | 2 May | *Charles at Tunbridge* performed at the Newcastle Theatre |
| | Oct | At the University of Cambridge |
| | 10 Nov | At University College London-- Admitted to the Inner Temple |
| 1829-30 | | Contributes to *London University Magazine* and other transient journals |
| 1829 | Jan | "Remarks on two of the Annuals" published |
| | ? | Met Leigh Hunt |
| 1831 | ? | Moves to 4, Burton Street, Burton Crescent |
| | ? | Meets Charles Lamb |
| 1832-4 | | Dramatic Critic on the *True Sun* |
| 1832 | ? | Meets Bulwer-Lytton |
| | ? | Preface to Hunt's Christiantism . . . . published |
| | Dec | Editor of *The Reflector* (3 nos. only issued) |
| 1833 | | Writes in *True Sun*, *Courier*, *Athenaeum*, and *Examiner* |
| | 25 May | Meets Macready |
| 1834 | ? | Becomes Literary and Dramatic Editor of *The Examiner* |

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[1] This biographical table is compiled from a number of published sources, too numerous to list here, but included in the Bibliography.

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| 1834 | ? | Moves to 58 Lincoln's Inn Fields |
| | Aug | Engagement to L. E. Landon announced |
| | Nov | Engagement broken off |
| 1835 | ? | Assists in editing the New Monthly Magazine |
| | Dec | Meets Dickens |
| 1836-40 | | Lives of the Statesmen of the Commonwealth published |
| 1836 | ? | Death of Forster's father |
| 1837-60 | | Reader and adviser to Chapman and Hall |
| 1842-3 | ? | Editor of the Foreign Quarterly Review |
| 1843 | | Forster ill during much of this year |
| | 27 Jan | Called to the Bar |
| 1844 | ? | Death of his brother, Christopher |
| 1845 | | "A History for Young England" published |
| | Jan | Review of The Chimes published |
| | Jan | "Charles Churchill" published |
| | 20 Sep | Amateur Theatricals, Every Man in his Humour (F played Kitely) |
| | Oct | "Daniel Defoe" published |
| 1846 | Feb-Oct | Editor of the Daily News |
| | ? | Assists in editing Works of Landor |
| | Apr | Review of Works of Landor published |
| 1847 | 1 Nov | Becomes editor of the Examiner |
| 1848 | | Life and Adventures of Oliver Goldsmith published |
| 1850-5 | | Assists in editing Household Narrative of Current Events; part-owner of Household Words and also an occasional contributor |
| 1852 | Mar | Death of Forster's mother |
| 1853 | ? | Death of his sister, Jane |
| 1854 | | Enlarged version of Life of Goldsmith published |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| | Sep | "Samuel Foote" published |
| 1855 | | Daniel De Foe and Charles Churchill |
| | Mar | "Sir Richard Steele" published |
| | 28 Dec | Appointed Secretary to the Commissioners of Lunacy |
| 1856 | Jan | "The Civil Wars and Oliver Cromwell" published |
| | 24 Sep | Marries widow of Henry Colburn |
| | Oct | Moves to 46 Montagu Square |
| 1858 | | Historical and Biographical Essays published |
| 1859 | 28 Aug | Death of Hunt |
| 1860 | | Arrest of the Five Members published |
| | | The Debates on the Grand Remonstrance published |
| | | Oliver Cromwell, Daniel De Foe, Sir Richard Steele, Charles Churchill, Samuel Foote, Biographical Essays published |
| 1861 | | "Strafford's Youth" published |
| | Nov | Appointed a Commissioner of Lunacy |
| 1862 | ? | Moves to Palace-Gate House, Kensington |
| 1864 | | Sir John Eliot published |
| | 17 Sep | Death of Landor |
| 1867 | Feb? | Receives honorary Doctorate from Trinity College, Dublin |
| 1868 | Dec | Death of his sister, Elizabeth |
| 1869 | | Walter Savage Landor, A Biography published |
| 1869 | 15 May | Death of Dyce |
| 1870 | 9 Jun | Death of Dickens |
| 1872 | 5 Apr | Resigns from Lunacy Commission |
| 1872-4 | | Life of Charles Dickens published |
| 1873 | 18 Jan | Death of Bulwer-Lytton |
| 1874 | | Sees through the press, Dyce's Works of Shakespeare (3rd Edn) |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| | | Speeches of Edward Lord Lytton, Ed. by F. |
| | 26 Feb | Will ratified |
| 1875 | ? | "Alexander Dyce; a Biographical Sketch" published |
| 1876 | Jan | Works of Landor, Vol 1 (an abridgement of the Life of Landor of 1869) published |
| | 1 Feb | Died |
| | ? | Life of Jonathan Swift, Vol I, published |

# CHAPTER 1

## INTRODUCTION: FORSTER AND THE EXAMINER

### I

John Forster (1812-76), the English journalist, biographer, historian, and critic, had an enormous literary influence in his own day; yet, it happens, because of various accidents, that he has been largely neglected by scholars of Victorian literature. There is, in fact, not one published scholarly work of value about his career and his influence upon such authors as Tennyson, Browning, and Landor, or (among the novelists) on Dickens, Thackeray, Bulwer-Lytton, Mrs. Gaskell, Ainsworth, and Wilkie Collins.

Forster's influence was exerted not only through private friendships, but he was also (at first) literary and dramatic editor, then editor, of the influential weekly journal, the Examiner (1834-55). The Examiner itself, is of the utmost importance to a study of this period.

Very briefly, it seems that he found his way into the London journals, in the first place, through the encouragement and help of Leigh Hunt.[1] Forster had been befriended by Hunt shortly after he had arrived in London from finishing his schooling at Newcastle Grammar School. But, as the biographical outline (pp.ix-xii) shows, even then-- at the age of seventeen --the precocious Forster was no stranger to journalism or to the theatre.

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[1] See below, pp. 6-7.

Indeed, he had approached the world of letters in a business-like manner from the very first, and by 1835, at twenty-three, he was already becoming one of the most influential and best-known figures in British journalism and literature.

It appears that he had set his sights on a permanent editorial position on the Radical-Whig Examiner from the start, and on being officially appointed as its theatrical reviewer, he relinquished the best part of his writing for other journals. His indispensability to Fonblanque, the editor,[1] was soon apparent, and he was quickly promoted to a subeditorship-- chiefly responsible for the literary and theatrical columns.

He continued to write the bulk of the theatrical and literary notices until 1848, when he became the general editor. From then on, it seems that he turned over as much reviewing as he could to others, although, of course, he still retained the full editorial responsibility for these columns.

At the close of 1855, in return for his journalistic services rendered to the Whig cause, he was appointed Secretary to the Commissioners of Lunacy, and from that time onwards, he seems to have turned almost completely away from the world of journalism.[2]

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[1]Albany Fonblanque (1793-1872; DNB), leader writer for the Examiner, 1826; editor, 1830-47; statistical officer in Board of Trade, 1847; member of the Dickens circle; his general style and approach to journalism, much like Dickens's; contributed regularly to the Examiner until at least 1859.

[2]See below, pp. 206-7.

## II

We start this study of Forster as a critic of fiction with a consideration of the journal he wrote in, and then of some of the ways that its policies and staff influenced his reviewing there.

The Examiner, itself, aimed primarily at the Liberal intellectual, had been founded in 1808 by John and Leigh Hunt, and from the start had been daringly critical of Court, Government, and Church. Because of this, it had experienced a stormy and unprofitable first few years, and during 1813-15, it had actually been edited from within Horsemonger Gaol, by Leigh Hunt, who, with his brother had been heavily fined and imprisoned for their editorial criticism of the Prince Regent.

Robert Gittings describes the journal in its early days, as being "for a modern audience . . . like a mixture of the New Statesman, the Times (new style), and (in good measure) the News of the World."[1] In Forster's time the front and second pages usually featured original leaders which were extremely acute political commentaries. The rest was largely compiled with the help of scissors and paste. Thus, the middle pages generally provided foreign and European news, along with a generous coverage of the "fashionable" world, and original literary, theatrical, and fine-arts reviews.

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[1] Robert Gittings, "Leigh Hunt's Examiner", Times Literary Supplement, 23 November 1967, 1111.

Other accounts of the history of the Examiner may be found in: Edmund Blunden, Leigh Hunt's 'Examiner' Examined (1928); James Grant, The Great Metropolis, Series I, 2 vols. (1837), II, 108-113; James Grant, The Newspaper Press, 2 vols. (1871), II, 45-54; The New Cambridge Bibliography of English Literature, ed. George Watson, Vol. 3 (Cambridge, 1969), p. (to be added)

The last part (in fine print), listed the details of crime reports-- often with a surprising frankness and detail.

Interestingly, the basic policies and composition of the Examiner differed relatively little from 1808 to 1855, when Forster gave up the editorship. If anything, it became less Radical as the years went by, but throughout most of the time that Forster was associated with the journal its political stand was essentially Radical Whig.

The literary section, as might be expected in those days of fierce factional reviewing, tended to echo the policies apparent elsewhere in the journal. It is perhaps predictable that this should have been so, for during much of his time with the Examiner, Forster wrote political leaders as well as literary and theatrical reviews each week. Besides, as assistant-editor under Fonblanque, and later as general editor, it was even less likely that as a reviewer he would divorce himself from the front page altogether. In those days, and in his position, he would have been an exceptional critic to have done so. Further, it so happens that his critical point of view was very much influenced by his long, and early, association with such politically orientated critics as Leigh Hunt, and Albany Fonblanque, as well as with the other contributors to the journal.

Such an influence was perhaps inevitable, for as has been pointed out elsewhere,[1] the Examiner was compiled by a group-- even a team --who influenced each other strongly.

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[1] A. W. C. Brice and K. J. Fielding, "Dickens and the Tooting Disaster", Victorian Studies, XII (December 1968), p. 228.

Other liberally-minded people writing in the journal during Forster's time, apart from Hunt, Landor and Fonblanque, were W. J. Fox, Laman Blanchard, Charles Lamb, Bulwer-Lytton, Dickens, Carlyle, John Stuart Mill, and Edwin Chadwick, just to name a few.

Fonblanque of course was the senior, and there is no doubt that his importance has been overlooked, and that the only biography of him is decidedly inadequate.[1] For Fonblanque was an extremely able journalist. In A New Spirit of the Age (1844), R. H. Horne remarked that "in his combined powers of the brilliant and argumentative, the narrative and epigrammatic, and his matchless adroitness in illustrative quotation and reference, Fonblanque stands alone."[2] Even Lady Lytton Bulwer, who disliked him intensely, had found him (in 1839) "unquestionably the best living English political writer," one whose "English was genuine, and his style terse and forcible in the extreme, having . . . the solidity and brilliancy of the diamond."[3] From a more personal standpoint, Carlyle was ready to characterise him in 1849 as "a serious-looking fellow, with fire in his eyes, who seemed to consider that his task in the world was to expose fallacies of of all sorts, which, in fact, he did with considerable adroit-

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[1] Albany Fonblanque, The Life and Labours of Albany Fonblanque, ed. E. B. de Fonblanque (1874).

[2] R. H. Horne, A New Spirit of the Age (1844), p. 211.

[3] Rosina Lytton Bulwer, Cheveley; or, The Man of Honour, 2 vols. (New York, 1839) II, 117.

ness and skill."[1] Fonblanque gathered many of his pieces together in England Under Seven Administrations (1837)[2] and it is evident that they have a sharp cutting edge, and that they justify the respect in which they were held.

The other earlier influence on Forster's critical outlook, was, of course, his friendship with Leigh Hunt. Hunt was still very much one of the Examiner circle, when Forster first met him in 1829, and he continued to contribute articles regularly until at least 1848.[3] His influence can be seen clearly enough in Forster's critical attitude. James A. Davies has illustrated this in his Ph.D. thesis.[4] But we might assume this anyway, since Forster tells us himself, in his correspondence, to what extent Hunt had influenced him. In the first place, he tells us: "Very probably Leigh Hunt led me, at least confirmed me in adopting literature as a profession, and but for him I might have been a popular leader on a circuit. . . ."[5] Again, in writing to Thornton Hunt on his father's death in 1859, he asserts: "With him seems to have passed away a portion of my own life. He was the first distinguished man of letters I ever knew; and the charm of his conversation, at the time when one is most

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[1]Charles Gavan Duffy, Conversations with Carlyle (1892), p. 84.

[2]Albany Fonblanque, England Under Seven Administrations (1837).

[3]See below, pp.190-203.

[4]James Atterbury Davies, "Aspects of the Literary Achievement of John Forster", Ph.D. Thesis, University of Swansea, 1969.

See also, James Atterbury Davies, "Leigh Hunt and John Forster," Review of English Studies, N.S.XIX, No. 73 (1968), pp. 25-40.

[5]Whitwell Elwin, "John Forster", Forster Collection: A Catalogue of the Printed Books (1888), p. xi.

susceptible to such influence, was such as I have never known in any other man."[1] On yet another occasion, in 1859, he confirmed that Hunt had "influenced all my modes of literary thought at the outset of my life."[2]

Yet, quite apart from its affect in helping to shape Forster's critical views, the Examiner circle, that included such unique writers as Fonblanque, Hunt, and Dickens, deserves a much closer consideration— even a full length study. For it has already been shown, elsewhere, how Dickens was influenced by this association with the staff of the Examiner.[3] No doubt the pattern of influences is complex, but it should be possible— eventually —to arrive at some interesting and worth-while conclusions about this very close circle of like-minded journalists and men of letters.

Already it can be argued that Forster's support of Dickens, Lytton, Macready and others, can be seen as much a support for Examiner policy, as a boast for his personal friends. The journal had always, naturally enough— considering its founders —given support to liberally-minded men of letters, and Dickens, Lytton, and Macready, especially, were very much a part of the Examiner circle.

There is, in fact, little doubt that such policies affected Forster's reviewing. This is perhaps most clearly demonstrated in some of his notices of Bulwer-Lytton's

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[1]L. A. Brewer, My Leigh Hunt Library: the Holograph Letters (Iowa, 1938), p. 248.

[2]Elwin, p. xi.

[3]Alec W. Brice, "Dickens and the 'Examiner': Some Newly Identified Essays", M. Litt. Thesis, University of Edinburgh, 1968, Passim.

fiction.[1] But, conversely, what is surprising, is the extent-- compared with Fonblanque --to which he was increasingly able to keep politics out of his reviewing.[2]

Thus the Examiner was essentially a topical weekly journal, and it is necessary to keep this in mind when considering Forster's reviews. In some ways they are more journalistic than those in more substantial literary journals. It is obvious, for example, that they were more immediate, in that they were written at weekly intervals, rather than monthly or quarterly. Further, Forster appears to have aimed at writing for a wider, less literary audience, and finally, unlike the reviews in the major literary journals, they were usually limited to only two or three columns each in length-- sometimes considerably less.

If these reviews often seem hurriedly done, it is little wonder. For, in addition to this responsibility, there was a world else to be done in preparing each issue of the journal. Yet, even this was just a small part of Forster's week, which often consisted of his own research and writing, his amateur theatrical work, his large correspondence and busy social life, his reading of manuscripts for Chapman and Hall, and for Dickens, Lytton, and a number of others, and his advising and involving himself in others' personal and professional problems.

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[1]See below, pp.103-113.

[2]See below, pp.123-4.

Fortunately, however, the kind of audience that Forster was reviewing for, did not expect, or particularly want, the kind of lengthy, more polished review that the Edinburgh Review or Blackwood's was offering. The readers of the Examiner simply wanted to know what books were being published, and what the Examiner of Forster-- the reputedly reliable judge of public taste and good literature --had to say about them.

Yet, in critiques as brief as the Examiner's usually were, the whole matter of balancing the criticism becomes much more difficult than in a longer review. A single note of adverse criticism in a notice only a column and a half long-- and much of that often extract --might easily create a false impression, that in the case of an otherwise deserving work would be unjust. As skilled as he was, Forster usually seems to have written too hurriedly to create so delicate a balance. But luckily he tended to optimism in his reviewing. This was partly because of the factionalism, just mentioned, partly because of his own temperament and personal outlook, and partly because of the tradition of generous reviewing that had been established in the journal by Leigh Hunt, who anyway had had a tremendous influence on Forster's own critical point of view. Even so, where he found it necessary to object, like Hunt, he often did not hesitate to do so-- even in the case of the work of a friend; but he did it, in such a case, by qualifying his praise, or by criticising openly, and following his criticism immediately with an excuse for the author-- often unconvincing --or, with lavish praise for another aspect of the work criticised.

This optimistic critical stance is, in fact, exemplified

quite clearly in the following highly critical extract from his review of Charles Kingsley's Alton Locke (1850)-- a book he did not approve of politically:[1]

> He can sketch a character neatly and vigorously, but the assumption fails in working. It wants vitality. His dramatis personae are vividly placed before us so long as he leaves them in repose; but the moment he sets them to speak and act, we see them plainly moved by impulses from without, and not from within. He puts many admirable sayings into their mouths, all of which would be more natural, more pleasing, and more effective, had he been contented to utter them in his own person.[2]

The optimist in Forster, even in a case like this, usually notes the best achievements of an author, and then tactfully, yet frankly, points out where they fall short of the ideal. Thus, although Kingsley can "sketch a character neatly and vigorously," in motion, it "wants vitality." The choice of Forster's words here is revealing. It would perhaps have been more effective, journalistically, to have found such a characterisation, "uninspired", or "lifeless". Again, in this passage, he claims that Kingsley "put many admirable sayings" into the mouths of his characters, which would have been (my italics) "more natural, more pleasing, and more effective," had they been part of the rhetoric of the novel, or included in a separate essay. Similarly "Alton Locke is not a genuine book," he writes elsewhere in this review, because of the "want of ideas and images derived from actual observation," and because of a "want of materials"

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[1] For Forster's view about Alton Locke, see below, pp. 134-9.

[2] Examiner (24 August 1850), p. 542.

to fill up the outline of an otherwise "perfectly successful" plot (my italics). The words I have italicised, suggest the constructive direction of his criticism even in the case of a book which was repellent to him because of its Chartist sympathies.

Unfortunately, Forster's trick of turning negative qualities into an appearance of near positives, in this way, also helps to complicate even further the already awkward structure of many of his sentences; but more to the point, looked at another way, his point of view results in a decided imbalance in his choice of qualitative words: if we list those in the above extract, we can begin to understand another of the reasons why Forster was, and is, often unfairly charged with puffery or leniency. The following words from the extract are those that imply a negatively charged connotation: ". . . but . . . fails . . . wants . . . not . . ." These are more than compensated for by the many words suggesting a positive connotation: ". . . neatly . . . vigorously . . . vitality . . . vividly . . . repose . . . plainly . . . admirable . . . natural . . . pleasing . . . effective . . . contented . . ." The fact that these are often considerably qualified, or are not always applied in a laudatory sense, does not entirely negate the over-all impression they leave in context.

Now Forster's optimistic critical point of view, means that we have to attune ourselves to his gradations in praise, if we are to make sense of his criticism. Weekly readers of his notices might be expected to have become used to his generous scale of praise or censure, as well as to the

implications of his stock terms. Thus they would have gathered that his review of Thackeray's Vanity Fair[1] was really quite unfavourable indeed despite Thackeray's avowed pleasure with it, and that his comment in the review of Lytton's Harold that he had "never laid down a book more reluctantly,"[2] was not necessarily true, but was a concise and emphatic way of recommending the book. Besides, in an approach to reviewing that tended so much to optimism, it is almost inevitable that he should often have been driven to exaggeration in order to emphasise a quality or book of especial merit.

Finally-- in considering some of the ways that the policies and staff of the Examiner affected Forster's reviewing --Professor Collins has raised a question about the delays in the reviewing of Dickens's novels in the journal. It so happens that this is a question that also relates to general practice in the journal, as well as to a particular set of circumstances. Professor Collins queries:

> Why indeed did Forster 'delay so long the notice' of Chuzzlewit, the final Number of which had appeared on 1 July? A similar delay occurred in his reviewing of the next novel, Dombey, in the Examiner-- from 1 April 1848 to 28 October 1848 --and again Forster had to make jocular-embarrassed apologies. Was he finding it difficult to devise the review that would satisfy his sensitive friend Dickens, or were they having a tiff? I do not know; but it is a strange couple of lapses. After Dombey, Forster was always prompt as well as cheering.[3]

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[1] See below, pp. 32-4.

[2] Examiner (17 June 1848), p. 388.

[3] Dickens: The Critical Heritage, ed. Philip Collins (1971), p. 184.

Now, there seem to be several possible explanations for the delays: the first is simply that it was not one of Forster's (or the journal's) priorities to be necessarily prompt in noticing any work. James Grant noted this in 1837, when he wrote, "The only drawback on the review department of the Examiner is, that the notices are often delayed,--so that the books reviewed are in a great measure forgotten before the notices appear."[1] This tendency of Forster to delay a review is perhaps most consistently and graphically seen in contrasting the timing of the very brief notices in the Household Narrative (for which Forster was responsible)[2] with those in the Examiner; for, in many instances, a book mentioned by Forster in the Household Narrative was not reviewed more fully in the Examiner until weeks, or even months later!

It may be that Forster was simply too busy to read through all of the important books as soon as they were published; but it may also be that he sometimes preferred to measure his own opinion with that of his friends and the public in general before he set down his own views in writing. This "deliberation" would mean that if desired, he could trim the balance of any adverse reception of a book. These may have been some of the factors in the delaying of these notices of Dickens's fiction that Professor Collins draws attention to. Yet, it seems more likely that, in the case

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[1] James Grant, The Great Metropolis, II, 112.

[2] See below, Appendix B.

of Dickens, that there is another explanation, which is more convenient to discuss here than in the chapter on Forster and Dickens.

I have claimed that Forster asked others to write many of the reviews of Dickens's works in the Examiner.[1] In fact I have also claimed (in Chapter 6) that Leigh Hunt was the chief of these. Now it so happens (as I have pointed out in that chapter) that Hunt was probably the author of both of the reviews that Professor Collins draws attention to. This being so, in these cases it would suggest that the delay may have been due to Hunt himself. For, on another occasion, as I have shown in the chapter on Dickens, Hunt delayed his promised critical comments on Nicholas Nickleby for about six weeks. Now, without anticipating myself too much, there are two other delays in the reviewing of Dickens's works, one of which can be put down to the same cause.

The notice of the last two numbers of Pickwick, written by Forster, mentions that he would "probably have something to say of the Pickwick Papers in the way of general criticism, on their . . . publication in a complete form."[2] Yet, in this case, there is not only a delay, but inexplicably, no further mention at all, except for brief comparative comments in later reviews. Again, the review of Nicholas Nickleby was postponed because Forster (or another) claimed that it "must give way this week to the Life and Adventures of Thomas Platter,[3] whose simple-hearted and earnest acquaintance we

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[1] See below, Chapter 6.

[2] Examiner (5 November 1837), pp. 708-9.

[3] Anon, The Autobiography of Thomas Platter . . . a Schoolmaster of the Sixteenth Century (1839).

have just made, and are anxious that our readers should lose no time in making also."[1] However, the literary columns of the next week featured, not Nicholas Nickleby, but instead, a bitter anti-Tory commentary on an article from the Quarterly Review.[2] Finally, three weeks late, came the review of Nickleby-- one that is almost certainly by Leigh Hunt,[3] and in view of the fairly inconsequential material ostensibly postponing the notice, it does look rather as if, once again, in this instance, Hunt himself could have been the delaying factor.

Perhaps the thing that this last point, and the thesis as a whole underlines, time and time again, is the difficulty of carrying out literary research in a journal in which very little detailed work has been previously done. Even after an attempt at ascription, each article still has to be considered in the light of journalistic policies (that have yet to be fully worked out), as well as to be seen in the light of the multitude of variables that place it in its contemporary context.

Nevertheless, I feel that a fruitful start has been made, and one that should encourage further research. The literary columns in the Examiner are now becoming more manageable, and their editor, John Forster, can now be seen more clearly as deserving the trust that authors and their readers placed in him, as a generally responsible and competent critic of fiction.

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[1] Examiner (13 October 1839), p. 643.

[2] Examiner (20 October 1839), pp. 661-2.

[3] See below, pp. 193-4.

# CHAPTER 2

## FORSTER AND THACKERAY

### I

Forster apparently first met Thackeray at the Procter's during 1838.[1] The critic had then already established himself as one of the powers in the worlds of journalism and letters. He was the literary adviser to Chapman and Hall, and for the previous four years had earned a reputation as the sensible and authoritative theatrical and literary critic of the Examiner. He was also the personal friend and literary adviser of some of the leading writers and dramatists of the day. Among men who already considered him a close friend were: Dickens, Ainsworth, Bulwer-Lytton, Leigh Hunt, Landor, Macready, and Charles Lamb, to name only a few. For these reasons and more, Forster was certainly a figure worth knowing, especially to a budding journalist and literary hopeful such as Thackeray then was.

By the same year, Thackeray, on the other hand, had not yet achieved any major distinction. His rather slim reputation as a writer of fiction rested mainly on the "Yellowplush Correspondence" which was being serialised in Fraser's Magazine, and enjoying enough popularity for him to receive an appreciable increase in pay for continuing it.[2]

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[1] Letters of Thackeray, 4 vols, ed. Gordon Ray(1945), I,cxxxiii.

[2] Gordon N. Ray, Thackeray the Uses of Adversity, 1811-1846(1955), p.198.

Even though the Examiner, not surprisingly, failed to notice the series at that time, it is not likely that Thackeray entirely escaped Forster's attention as a writer of fiction: some highly critical comments in the "Yellowplush" series about the profession of letters, and the personal attack on Forster's friend, Bulwer-Lytton, alone would have assured that.[1] Yet, on reviewing the series on its republication in 1841, Forster found the humour irresistible, "however gravely we may happen to differ with his opinions," and even though he declined to comment on the "unintelligible spleen against one most distinguished man of letters," he found that the "Yellowplush Correspondence" in general, and the other miscellaneous tales and sketches included in the volumes, were "full of humour, and talent of various kinds."[2]

As well as writing for Fraser's, Bentley's Miscellany, and the Times, by 1838, Thackeray had also edited several minor and short-lived periodicals. Thus, in addition to being the author and able illustrator of a popular series of articles, he had also become a relatively experienced and talented journalist, and no doubt appeared to Forster as someone of promise.

Apart from professional considerations, Thackeray and Forster were quite likely congenial enough to each other at

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[1] "Mr. Yellowplush's Ajew", Fraser's Magazine (August 1838), pp. 195-200; "Epistles to the Literati", Fraser's Magazine (January 1840), pp. 71-80.

[2] Examiner (2 May 1841), p. 275.

first. Gordon N. Ray observes in his biography of Thackeray that the novelist was "a remarkably engaging and admirable person,"[1] and quotes Richard Bedingfield who recalled that Thackeray had "more feeling, more generosity, more manliness, and more shrewd common sense than most men of genius."[2] Dickens, remembered his "warm affections, his quiet endurance, his unselfish thoughtfulness for others, and his munificent hand," as well as his "natural gentleness . . . his thoroughly unaffected manly sympathy with the weak and lowly," and his "good sense, good spirits, and good humour."[3]

There is also ample evidence to illustrate the positive qualities of Forster's personality, and it seems unfair that the image that has stuck, is that portrayed in Percy Fitzgerald's John Forster by One of His Friends.[4] Unfortunately, this much quoted little volume of reminiscences and anecdotes, caricatures Forster as a lesser Dr. Johnson at his most autocratic and gouty. Such a view can probably be accounted for, because Fitzgerald, writing at the age of sixty-nine, and looking back beyond an intervening distance of twenty-seven years since Forster's death, remembered him chiefly as a middle-aged, ailing, and overworked Commissioner of Lunacy.

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[1]Gordon N. Ray, Thackeray: the Uses of Adversity, 2 vols. (1955), I, 17.

[2]Richard Bedingfield, "Recollections of Thackeray", Cassell's Magazine, II (1870), 28.

[3]Charles Dickens, "In Memoriam: W. M. Thackeray", The Cornhill Magazine (February 1864); reprinted in the Collected Papers.

[4]Percy Fitzgerald, John Forster by One of his Friends (1903).

For, being Forster's junior by twenty-two years, he had never known him personally, as he had been in his prime--as the general editor of the Examiner, or as James Whiteside,[1] knew him, when Forster was a "raw oddly-dressed, energetic impetuous youth from the provinces," who "loved literature and politics - was joyous, generous, sincere and was the uncompromising advocate of all that was just, noble and good."[2] Even R. H. Horne, whose friendship with Forster had gone sour,[3] admitted that "those who have only known Mr. Forster in later years, could scarcely imagine what a good fellow he always appeared, and always so on convivial occasions . . . how pleasant, how jocose."[4] "A most sterling man, with an intellect at once massive and delicate," wrote Bulwer Lytton, who was one of Forster's oldest friends, "Few indeed have his strong practical sense and sound judgement. . . . He has the rare capacity for affection which embraces many friendships without loss of depth or warmth in one." Making allowance for the flaws mainly of his later years, Bulwer continues: "What faults he has lie on the surface. He is sometimes bluff to rudeness. But all such faults of manner (and they

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[1]James Whiteside (1804-76; DNB), became Lord Chief-Justice of Ireland. He and Forster had studied law together at University College, London. They remained close and lifelong friends.

[2]Letter, James Whiteside to Warwick Elwin (23 February 1876), quoted from Professor K. J. Fielding, "How the Letters were Found", Boston University Studies in English, II (Autumn 1953).

[3]Ann Blainey, The Farthing Poet: a Biography of Richard Hengist Horne, a Lesser Literary Lion (1968), pp. 100-1 and 181.

[4]R. H. Horne, "John Forster: his Early Life and Friendships", Temple Bar, XLVI (1876), 491.

are his only ones) are but trifling inequalities in a nature solid and valuable as a block of gold."[1]

Thackeray's friendship with Forster lasted intermittently until a few years before the novelist's death in 1863. Yet, even at the best of times it was often an uneasy relationship. At the heart of the differences which divided them (discussed below) lay Thackeray's cynical view of society, which Forster considered seriously marred his fiction, his private and public caricaturing of Forster, Forster's own factional reviewing, and above all, the critic's attitude to the place of the man of letters in society.

Now, Forster had become recognised as a champion of the man of letters, especially since the publication of his biography of Goldsmith in 1848.[2] He actively promoted the cause of the dignity of letters in every way that he could, including, of course, through his own writing in the Examiner. But Thackeray, seeming half-ashamed of what he considered his own "ungentlemanly" role as a writer of fiction and journalism, occasionally scoffed in his fiction and elsewhere at such elevated views of the profession, and so brought down upon himself the ire of Forster and his faction.

As well as these well-documented differences, it is also possible that there may have been occasional jealousy on the part of Thackeray, for some of his personal goals were (in

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[1] From a note attached to letters Bulwer-Lytton had received from Forster. Quoted from Earl of Lytton, The Life of Edward Bulwer, First Lord Lytton, 2 vols. (1913), I, 372-3.

[2] John Forster, The Life and Adventures of Oliver Goldsmith (1848); enlarged as The Life and Times of Goldsmith (1854).

the course of things) anticipated by Forster. Thackeray had offered himself as editor for Chapman and Hall's newly-acquired Foreign Quarterly Review,[1] but although they encouraged him to contribute to it regularly, Forster (since 1837 their literary advisor) was appointed to the post instead. Again, when Forster published his Life of Goldsmith, Thackeray wrote to congratulate him, saying, "I would not write to thank you for Goldsmith, until I had finished reading him and although I wanted to write a life of him myself . . . what can I say, but that your book is delightful?"[2] Yet again, when in 1855 Forster was appointed Secretary to the Commissioners of Lunacy, Thackeray wrote to Mrs. Procter, "I often, no sometimes, used to think I would like that place of Secretary which Forster has. . . ."[3] In all these cases, though, it is fair to add that Thackeray seemed outwardly genuinely pleased with Forster's success.[4]

With this general background of their strained, although occasionally warm, relationship, we may now go on to consider Forster's reviewing of Thackeray's fiction.

## II

Fortunately for this study, in spite of the differences between the two friends, Forster noticed most of Thackeray's works that were published in Britain during the years he was

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[1] Letters of Thackeray, I, cxxxiv.

[2] Ibid., II, 370.

[3] Ibid., III, 583.

[4] Ibid., II, 56 and 370-1; III, 564.

on the staff of the Examiner. The notable exception was Pendennis, which was ignored by the Examiner except for a few deprecatory words in two leaders written by Forster on the dignity of literature controversy.[1]

He was also usually quite generous in the amount of space given to notices or reviews of Thackeray's writings, especially when it is considered how relatively little room was generally available for fictional reviewing in the journal, even during the prolific late forties.[2]

On the other hand, typical of most of his reviewing in the Examiner, the notices of Thackeray's fiction often have the appearance of having been hurriedly written, and are often-- also typically --filled out considerably with extracts in fine print. For example, of The Irish Sketch Book's four and a half columns, only about a column and a half is given to critical comment;[3] of Rebecca and Rowena's three columns, only about one,[4] and of The Newcomes' five columns, only two.[5] Further, even much of the so-called critical comment often chiefly consists of a recapitulation of the story, leaving us with relatively little of any real value, and less still when we make a further allowance for Forster's inclination to partisan puffery-- more of a problem in his reviews of Bulwer-Lytton.

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[1]See below, p. 35.

[2]In the Examiner before 1848, up to five columns were allocated each week for literary reviewing; from 1848, up to six columns. Reviewing of fiction throughout Forster's time with the journal, occupied roughly one third of the available space.

[3]Examiner (13 May 1843), pp. 292-3.

[4]Ibid. (5 January 1850), pp. 5-6.

[5]Ibid. (1 September 1855), pp. 548-9.

Even so, there are compensatory factors. Taken collectively, the twenty or so reviews and mentions of Thackeray's fiction in the Examiner do present a fairly clear picture of what, in general, Forster thought of his work at each stage of the novelist's development. For, with all their limitations, the notices are quite numerous, and are sown throughout with nuggets of sound criticism which may be further illuminated against the background of Forster's criticism of others' fiction. Again, it is fortunate that his maturity as a critic, and his remaining years with the Examiner coincide with the publication of Thackeray's greatest works. The reviews of Vanity Fair (1848), and Henry Esmond (1852), are accordingly of special value to this study. Finally, because of references in Thackeray's correspondence,[1] the subject matter of the notices, and Forster's distinctive style,[2] we may be reasonably certain that all of the reviews and mentions of Thackeray in the Examiner between 1840 and 1852 are by Forster himself.[3]

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[1] Letters of Thackeray, I, 457; II, iii, 257, 403, 404, 779; III, 154, 250.

[2] For a brief discussion of Forster's writing style see: S. Monod, "John Forster's 'Life of Dickens' and Literary Criticism", English Studies Today, 4th Series (Rome 1966), 367-71.

[3] In addition, a very minor notice of Flore et Zephyr, Thackeray's humorous series of drawings caricaturing the ballet "La Sylphide", appeared in the fine arts section of the Examiner. The reviewer, who may have been Forster, found the sketches "excellently executed, full of expression and drollery," and recommended them to "all who love a hearty laugh." Examiner (8 May, 1836), p. 294. Also possibly by Forster, is another minor notice of Cox's Diary, which Thackeray had contributed to Cruikshank's Comic Almanak for 1840. The reviewer comments: "There is not a laughing fireside in this jovial and hearty season that would not find its laughter and pleasant thoughts increased by a perusal of this excellent story." Examiner (29 December 1839), pp. 821-2.

## III

It is clear from Forster's reviews of Thackeray's fiction and sketchbooks written before 1847-- the year of their first recorded major quarrel --that he was among the first to recognise the novelist's ability. His reviews, then, were reservedly friendly and encouraging, and Thackeray, judging by his correspondence, was pleased enough to see them.[1] Yet Thackeray's writing before 1847, with the exception of the two sketchbooks, was very much apprentice work. It voiced no sustained and controversial criticism of society, and represented no serious threat to Dickens's supremacy in the world of fiction. Thus it was easy enough for Forster to treat Thackeray's early writings good-naturedly, although even here, compared with his reviews of Dickens, Bulwer-Lytton and others, his reserve is often striking.

One of the aspects of Thackeray's writing that Forster appears to have admired at first, was his satire, provided that it was not bitter and was judiciously aimed. It is a quality we might expect him to appreciate, since in many ways Forster tended to look back to the eighteenth-century satirists such as Fielding, Swift, Defoe, and Goldsmith, for his models in criticising fiction. In fact, there is probably a good case for claiming Forster as one of the literary links between the two centuries-- especially more directly through the influence of such close friends as Walter Savage Landor, and Charles Lamb, both of whom he knew well and greatly admired, and through Leigh Hunt, a man thoroughly steeped in

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[1] Letters of Thackeray, see above, p.23, n. 1.

the literature of the previous century.[1] Yet, although much more could be made of this point, we need go no further than Forster's own reviewing in the Examiner to see the extent of his involvement with eighteenth-century literature. Time and time again, comparisons are made with the works of the previous century, which are applied as touchstones.

It is no surprise then, that Forster should find so much (in addition to the irony) to delight him in much of Thackeray's fiction. For, by the novelist's own admission, he was himself influenced by eighteenth-century authors to the point of unconscious imitation, especially in his early writings.[2] Thackeray's favourite was Fielding; but his interest in the earlier age and its writers went beyond Fielding, as is shown by his series of lectures on the English humourists of that time,[3] his sketches of "Manners, Morals, Court, and Town Life" during the reigns of the four Georges,[4] and his expressed intention to have written a life of Goldsmith.[5] This lifelong enthusiasm not only clearly expressed itself in the choice of the setting of many of his novels, but also stamped itself on the characteristics of his own genius, and helped to shape almost everything he wrote.

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[1] See above, pp. 6-7.

[2] Letters of Thackeray, III,402.

[3] W. M. Thackeray, The English Humourists of the Eighteenth Century. A Series of Lectures, Delivered in England, Scotland, and the United States of America (1853).

[4] W. M. Thackeray, The Four Georges: Sketches of Manners, Morals, Court and Town Life (New York 1860).

[5] Letters of Thackeray, II, 370.

We are denied Forster's studied opinion of two early examples of this influence, since Catherine (Fraser's Magazine, May 1839 to February 1840) and The Luck of Barry Lyndon (Fraser's Magazine, January to December 1844) were not republished in Britain until after Forster had left the Examiner. We might imagine, though, that he would hardly have appreciated Thackeray's categorising Dickens's Oliver Twist (1838) and Bulwer Lytton's Eugene Aram (1832) with Jack Sheppard (1840), as he did in Catherine.[1] Both of these former novels were among Forster's favourites, and both of them he had defended (in the Examiner[2]) against charges of immorality.

He did comment briefly on the first number of The Luck of Barry Lyndon,[3] and, predictably, it is the "dry, sarcastic running commentary" that he notices with apparent satisfaction, for it "promises a large fund of truth and humour." Yet, except for a promise to watch the progress of the story with "curiosity and interest," the rest of the column is filled out with finely-printed extract.

The four other less significant works of Thackeray's noticed by Forster in this early period, also received good-natured but cursory considerations, which were either well filled out with extracts and recapitulations, or were very brief.

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[1] The Biographical Edition of the Works of W. M. Thackeray (1913), IV, 520 and 668. (Hereafter cited as "Works").

[2] See below, pp. 71 and 81-3.

[3] Examiner (6 January 1844), p. 5.

The first of these, The Second Funeral of Napoleon (1841), Forster found "sensible, instructive" and "amusing", and expressed a hope that "Mr. Titmarsh himself will pocket his fair share of the profits,"[1] a comment reminding us that Forster's interest in the works he reviewed, even of Thackeray's, may have included practical considerations.

The second of these lesser early works was noticed in the same review, since it was published with the Second Funeral of Napoleon. In "The Chronicle of the Drum" (1841), "a serious ballad of considerable power" he again typically draws attention to the "under-current of manly satire," but found also "a most John Bullish Franco-mania" instead of "the ordinary impartiality of Mr. Titmarsh."

Comic Tales and Sketches (1841), reviewed a few months later, has already been cited as an example of Forster's early recognition of Thackeray's talent, as well as his annoyance at the caricaturing of Bulwer-Lytton and the literary profession.[2] Yet it is a pity that Forster was not more specific in his assertion of Thackeray's talent, other than to say that he found the volumes "full of humour and talent of various kinds."

The last of these minor pre-1848 works noticed by Forster, is Mrs. Perkins's Ball (1847). Again, typical of Forster's early reviewing especially, of the three columns and a quarter, there is only a sentence or two of critical

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[1] Ibid. (17 January 1841), p. 37.

[2] See above, p. 17.

commentary. Once again, the bulk of the review is given over to recapitulation and extracts. Forster comments that "being the production of a true humourist and nice observer of character, it is a book that will amuse in all seasons. Mirth with a ground of character is always mirth."[1]

Finally, in this early period, even Thackeray's more successful sketch books-- The Paris Sketch Book (1840), and The Irish Sketch Book (1843), were reviewed by Forster in the same good-natured manner. Both notices occupied about four columns each, but once again, only a fraction consists of real critical comment.

"The Paris Sketch Book is . . . a very graphic portraiture, as far as Mr. Titmarsh has cared to make it so, of certain phases of Parisian society,"[2] Forster wrote, in what seems to be a rather indifferent compliment. He went on to praise "Beatrice Merger", an inset story which he found "remarkable for its pathos and simplicity," and which would have "done honour to the natural and happy invention of Goldsmith, or the pathetic humour of Sterne." He also found the section on "Meditations at Versailles", "remarkable" for its "thoughtful truth and fiery sarcasm." The notice also expresses Forster's appreciation of Thackeray's opinions on French drama, painting, morality, and art appreciation, which views he found to be "conceived in an enlarged spirit, and expressed in a manly fashion."

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[1] Examiner (19 December 1846), p. 805.

[2] Ibid (19 July 1840), p.451.

This latter view of what Forster considered to be Thackeray's fair-mindedness, is repeated in his review of The Irish Sketch Book (1843). "There is no pretension in the book before us, and no party spirit," he writes, "but there is a great deal of lively writing, sharp observation, and excellent feeling. In the author's objections we do not see anything uncandid, or narrow-minded, or ungenerous; and in what he selects for praise a very manly tolerant spirit is shown."[1] Yet in the next paragraph, he first touches on an aspect of Thackeray's writing that from Vanity Fair onwards was to become a focus of complaint in his reviews of the novelist— a "radical . . . defect" that Forster felt threatened to "run uncorrected through his writings to the last."[2] He writes, "We could have spared the self-proclamations of cockneyism. They are not merely a vapid and unmeaning pleasantry, but, with other exclamations, fall in at awkward times— as if the writer were not quite free from the miserable shame of being thought too sensible, too earnest, over-stocked with feeling and sincerity."

Further this rather political notice of the Irish Sketch Book appeared about eight months after a brief but very generous notice of William Carleton's Traits and Stories of Irish Peasantry (1842),[3] and we might expect that Thackeray compared the two reviews, and felt a twinge of annoyance at seeing his own work used as an excuse for political commentary,

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[1] Examiner (13 May 1843), p. 292.

[2] Ibid. (13 November 1852), p. 724.

[3] Ibid. (3 September 1842), p. 565, and see below, p.

and without the extravagant praise that had been so freely given to Carleton's tales. Yet, the aspiring Thackeray was on relatively friendly terms with Forster during these years, and no doubt expected a certain amount of political controversy over his work, since so much of it was political in implication, and anyway, he held a high opinion of Carleton's works himself, referring to the author (in 1844) as "by far the greatest genius who has written of Irish life."[1] At any rate, he seemed pleased with Forster's "splendid" review of his own Sketches.[2]

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There are a number of conclusions to be drawn from a consideration of these early reviews. Firstly, it is obvious-- and must have been to Thackeray --that although Forster's comments are generous up to a point, they appear less so when compared with his notices of others' fiction. Secondly, the notices themselves are usually brief and superficial, and although there are a number of reasons why they should have been so (reasons which take into account the limited space available, Forster's own inexperience, and the relative slightness of Thackeray's work at this time), no doubt Thackeray also took due note. Yet, Forster does not appear to have been deliberately playing down his literary efforts during this period. In fact, anticipating ourselves a little, he seems to have genuinely appreciated Thackeray's

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[1] "A Box of Novels", Fraser's Magazine (February 1844), p.155

[2] Letters of Thackeray, II, 111.

fairly inoffensive early works, just as he preferred the lighter side of Dickens's.[1] On the other hand, though, it does seem that at least as early as 1843, with his comments about the "self-proclamations of cockneyism" in his review of the Irish Sketch Book, Forster already began to have some reservations.

IV

It was in 1847 that Forster confided to Tom Taylor,[2] in a casual conversation, that he thought Thackeray had been "as false as hell."[3] He was referring to Thackeray's caricatures of himself, Bulwer Lytton, and others, as well as to what he considered Thackeray's betrayal of the literary profession in his writing.[4] Unfortunately, Taylor was tactless enough to report these words to Thackeray, making matters even worse by quoting them out of context. The resulting quarrel prompted an exchange of letters between Forster, Thackeray, and Taylor, until Dickens and Alexander Duff-Gordon, acting as conciliators,

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[1] See below, pp. 158-60.

[2] Tom Taylor (1817-1880; DNB), professor of English literature, barrister, journalist, dramatist, Secretary to the Board of Health, 1854, and editor of Punch, 1874-80; Taylor was chiefly known by his friends as a fairly prolific journalist of some merit.

[3] Letters of Thackeray, II, 295.

[4] For an example of one of Thackeray's caricatures of Forster, see Letters of Thackeray, II, 251-2; his frequent lampoonery of Bulwer-Lytton in Fraser's Magazine, Punch and elsewhere, were proverbial, and he made little secret in his writings of his want of enthusiasm for journalism and journalists.

were able to bring about a reconciliation dinner.[1]

Although the affair was over in just a few days, it was clearly indicative of the extent of the growing misunderstandings and basic differences of opinion between the two men, and some of Forster's disillusionments found a focus in his reviews of Vanity Fair (1848) and Henry Esmond (1852).

These two novels were treated with more seriousness and at greater length than anything he had noticed of Thackeray's before. This is probably both because they demanded and deserved more attention, and also because by this time Forster himself (and the reading public) had come to educate themselves into a greater interest in critical questions about the novel. Because of this more concentrated consideration the increasing reservations he felt about Thackeray's fiction became more apparent in them.

His growing reservations centred on what he felt was Thackeray's excessively cynical and ultimately false portrayal of society. For this he blamed what he called "the radical . . . defect" of Thackeray's "crude way of viewing human nature."[2] For while Forster usually appreciated social satire, he felt that compared with Fielding's, an "equal amount of large cordiality" was missing in Thackeray's fiction," making his "a less comfortable and on the whole . . . a less true view

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[1] Letters of Thackeray, II, 294-304.

[2] Examiner (13 November 1852), p. 724.

of society."[1]

Commenting, in his review of the novel, on one aspect of this criticism— the characterisation in Vanity Fair — Forster moderates considerably his more generous judgments of Thackeray's earlier works. For although he finds that his "genteel characters . . . have a reality about them" which he could not recall "in any recent work of fiction except [Bulwer-Lytton's] Pelham," he also notices "a tendency to caricature, to select in preference grotesque and unpleasing lineaments even where no exaggeration is indulged, that detracts considerably from the pleasure such high artistic abilities might otherwise afford." He continues, in this review of Vanity Fair: "We gasp for a more liberal alternation of refreshing breezes of unsophisticated honesty. Fielding, after he has administered a sufficient dose of Blifil's choke-damp, purifies the air by a hearty laugh from Tom Jones. But the stifling ingredients are administered by Mr. Thackeray to excess, without the necessary relief."

Even Thackeray's friend, the journalist Robert Bell, agreed in part with Forster's remarks: "More light and air would have rendered it more agreeable and more healthy. The author's genius takes him off too much in the direction of satire."[2] Yet Bell's review pleased Thackeray in general, and in writing to thank him for it, he attempted to justify

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[1] Ibid. (22 July 1848), p. 469.

[2] Fraser's Magazine (September 1848), pp. 320-3 ; reprinted in Thackeray: the Critical Heritage, eds. Geoffrey Tillotson and Donald Hawes (1968), pp. 62-7.

his own point of view. He wrote: "We are for the most part an abominably foolish and selfish people 'desperately wicked' and all eager after vanities. . . . I want to leave everybody dissatisfied and unhappy at the end of the story-- we ought all to be with our own and all other stories." Then referring specifically to Forster's review, with which he had also expressed a general approval,[1] he adds, "Who dares talk of having any virtue at all? For instance Forster says After a scene with Blifil, the air is cleared by a laugh of Tom Jones-- Why Tom Jones in my holding is as big a rogue as Blifil. Before God he is-- I mean the man is selfish according to his nature as Blifil according to his."[2]

For the next four years after Forster's review of Vanity Fair, judging by Thackeray's letters and Forster's reviews, their relationship suffered a great deal, mostly over the dignity of letters controversy, in which they were both among the most outspoken, and in which they were directly opposed to each other: Forster essentially calling for state aid and greater recognition for men of letters and science, and Thackeray taking the opposite view that they should have no special advantage over other professions.

At the close of 1850 Thackeray describes a dinner given by Bradbury and Evans where "Dickens, Jerrold, Forster and

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[1] Letters of Thackeray, II, 403.

[2] Ibid., II, 423-4.

your humble servant sate sparring at each other."[1] This dinner had been preceded by two leaders by Forster on the dignity of letters.[2] Referring in one of them to a passage in Pendennis (1849)-- a book not reviewed by Forster probably because of its "baneful prejudice thrown out against the craft" of letters[3]-- the critic repeats his criticism of The Irish Sketch Book (1843), only this time more bluntly: "Mr. Thackeray is continually doing himself wrong by a tone of persiflage which is seldom in perfect good taste. No man says gentler, kinder, more just things . . . from a more genuine feeling; yet we rarely find them unaccompanied by a sort of uneasy shame at having yielded to the indulgence of the luxury."[4]

These leaders were followed later by a series of unflattering notices of Thackeray's lectures on eighteenth-century humourists,[5] which was an added reason that prompted the novelist to slap "Forster's face (epistolarily)," and to

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[1] Ibid., II, 704.

[2] Examiner (5 January 1850), p. 2 and (19 January 1850), p. 35.

[3] Examiner (5 January 1850), p. 2.

[4] Ibid. (19 January 1850), p. 35. This leader was an affirmation of the views expressed in the earlier one, and written in response to Thackeray's open letter to the Morning Chronicle (12 January 1850), in which the novelist protests that "the charges of the Examiner against a man who has never, to his knowledge been ashamed of his profession . . . are . . . not proven," and that it is a charge which is "as absurd as it is unjust. . . ."

[5] See bibliography. The series of six lectures was later published (1853) as The English Humourists of the Eighteenth Century, and was reviewed by Forster in the Examiner (11 June 1853), pp. 372-3, when he considerably softened his criticisms but without actually retracting his previously expressed views.

declare that he could not "ever be friends with him again."[1]

The first of these lectures was on Swift, and Forster thought him to be "somewhat hardly judged on certain points by the lecturer," and was "indisposed to think Swift so low or so lofty as Mr. Thackeray at various times represented him."[2] (Exr, 24 May 1851, p.326.) Nor was his remark that it was inevitable that in a popular lecture "much should be sacrificed to effect," any less critical. Much as this notice must have galled Thackeray, since Forster rarely if ever criticised so negatively a speech by Dickens or Bulwer-Lytton, the next mention of Thackeray's last lecture in the series must have angered him even more. For, the lecture dealing with Sterne and Goldsmith, and closing with some controversial views on the position of the man of letters in England, drew forth the following invective from Forster:

> Neither our time or space this week will permit us to advert to some vehement sallies of doubtful doctrine and more than doubtful taste with which Mr. Thackeray indulged himself in this last lecture. The treatment of Sterne was (to our thinking) a piece of extravagant injustice, and it did not seem to us that Goldsmith fared much better under the superabundance of pitying praise poured out upon him.[2]

This was followed the next week by a lengthy leader dealing exclusively with Thackeray's concluding remarks about the profession of letters.[3] This would lead us away from

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[1] Letter to his mother (15 July 1851), Letters of Thackeray, II, 792.

[2] Examiner (5 July 1851), p. 422.

[3] Ibid. (12 July 1851), pp. 433-4.

our subject, but it will be sufficient to note here, that the differences between them over this issue were more pronounced than ever, and Forster's leader was apparently the last straw for Thackeray. He explained in a letter to Jane Carlyle shortly after it appeared:

> . . . I thought as much about the concluding paragraph of the lecture: but I was in such a rage that's the fact, and with that poor old blundering Jack Forster, for 2 years of treason envy and foul play-- the more difficult to bear because I wouldn't be offended with him until at last the wrath exploded in a letter wc. is like a slap on the face, and wc. I hope will be final as regards rupture or reconciliation between the poor old quack and myself.[1]

In November later that year, Thackeray again confirmed that "with poor Jack Forster it is well not to try to be friends again,"[2] and later that month he met Forster and "shook sham-hands."[3] Finally, in December 1852 while the dignity of letters issue still divided them, he claimed, "I didn't even read poor Forster's review,"[4] a reference to the Examiner's review of Henry Esmond.[5]

Esmond (1852) was clearly a book likely to appeal to Forster on various grounds. It was unique in Thackeray's skilful imitation of the prose style of an earlier age-- a style in the tradition of Addison and Steele, which had always

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[1]Undated, Scottish National Library MS 666 (unpublished).

[2]Letters of Thackeray, II, 811.

[3]Ibid., II, 815.

[4]Ibid., III, 155.

[5]Examiner (13 November 1852), pp. 723-6.

been admired by Forster. As well as this, it could not have seemed to him to rival Dickens on his own ground, as Vanity Fair obviously did, and as Pendennis noticeably did.[1] Further, as we have seen, Forster shared with Thackeray a lively love of the eighteenth century, especially of the first half of it. So, in his second paragraph he began by saying that:

> We have at once to express, in the warmest terms of praise, our appreciation of the skill and taste with which Esmond is written. Mr. Thackeray has caught the true tone of the writers of Queen Anne's time, and has sprinkled with a duly sparing hand the few peculiarities of grammar proper to them. . . . There is no excess, no strain after effect . . . and the result displayed in the volumes before us is a novel of which the literary workmanship commands unstinted praise.

Yet, even though he could enthuse to this extent, Forster was still not prepared to exempt other aspects of the novel from a fairly searching criticism; and, once again, although his criticisms are justifiable, they probably galled Thackeray (always assuming that he at least eventually read them), especially as they came from a critic who was so obviously partial to the work of special friends.[2]

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[1] Pendennis had appeared at the same time as David Copperfield; it had also been a first-person story of a writer, and it had been published by the same publisher, only in yellow monthly wrappers instead of green ones. The two works had also at times even been reviewed together.

[2] Thackeray's sense of frustration about Forster's partiality is reflected in the following passage (later omitted) from the first edition of Henry Esmond itself (II, 307-9; quoted in Letters of Thackeray, II, 780). Steele and Boxer here stand for Thackeray and Forster, The Observer for The Examiner, and Congreve and Dr. Arbuthnot for Dickens and Dr. Eliotson:

> "Mr. Boxer and my husband were friends once, and when the captain was ill with the fever no man could be kinder than Mr. Boxer, who used to come

Forster was ready to find the story "faulty in several respects," and "by no means equal to Vanity Fair in interest," and although he praised Esmond for showing a "better and healthier tone of social feeling" than Vanity Fair, he still held serious reservations in this respect:

> We wish it were possible for us to say more than this, and to add that Mr. Thackeray, before writing Esmond, had quite conquered what we hold to be the defect in his mind which obstructs the free development of his genius, and appears hitherto to have rendered it impossible for him to present pictures of life that we can regard as true copies. If Mr. Thackeray could but have faith in the hidden spark of divinity which few men or women lose out of their hearts, if he could see his neighbours really as they are and so describe them, if he could be brought to feel that there is fairer play in finding the good that is in evil things than in dragging out the evil that is in good things,-- his hold upon true fame, still for the present doubtful, would be assured and strong. As he now sees life and paints it, he is wasting the genius and resources of an admirable colourist on pictures false in drawing and perspective."

Surely Forster was taking up the dispute here, once again, that divided readers of the time, many of whom thought that for all his mingled sentiment and realism, Thackeray's view of human nature was false. Thackeray's own claims to be a realist, were especially provoking to Forster, not simply because the novelist's views seemed to contrast so directly with the art of Dickens and Bulwer-Lytton (Forster's closest friends), but also because Forster himself had always

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> to his bedside every day, and actually brought Dr. Arbuthnot who cured him. . . . But when the Captain's last comedy came out, Mr. Boxer took no notice of it,-- you know he is Mr. Congreve's man, and won't ever give a word to the other house, --and this made my husband angry."
>
> "O! Mr. Boxer is Mr. Congreve's man!" says Mr. St. John.
>
> "Mr. Congreve has wit enough of his own," cries out Mr. Steele. "No one ever heard me grudge him or any other man his share."

held the view that the truth about human nature lay somewhere between the good and evil, and that it was the duty of the artist, without falsifying, to strike some sort of balance between the two. "It is the province of an artist to modify and in some cases to refine what he beholds in the ordinary world,"[1] he once wrote. In yet another place he had approved of Count D'Orsay's pronouncement that "Art is not a study of positive reality-- it is a selection of ideal truth. . . ."[2]

Thackeray, on the other hand, held (as we have seen) that "we are for the most part an abominably foolish and selfish people 'desperately wicked' and all eager after vanities,"[3] and that the art of the novelist was to "convey as strongly as possible the sentiment of reality."[4]

Forster faces this challenge from Thackeray, of his claim to be a realist (if we may look at it in this way) and says, in his review of Esmond, firstly, that his conception of human nature is wrong, and that consequently his character-creation is false. It is wrong, partly because Thackeray undervalues the good in men, and seems able only to play variants on the trick of showing even the best as being distinguished by their faults. Secondly, he says that Thackeray simply does not understand human nature; and that although

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[1] Examiner (8 January 1848), p. 22.

[2] Ibid. (10 July 1847), p. 436.

[3] Letters of Thackeray, II, 423.

[4] Ibid., II, 772.

perhaps we are all, clearly enough, partly good and partly ill, his characters are inconsistent. He does not show "round" characters, in fact, but morally cubist ones: they are not merely two dimensional, but they are not "natural" either.

In pursuing this criticism, Forster is unrelenting, and it is hardly to be doubted that he sincerely believed that what he was writing was true of Thackeray, and that this also represents Forster's own, deeply held, moral view related to his own conception of character and his criticism of fiction. Looking back on Forster's earlier work, in this review of Esmond, he comments:

> It seems to us that Mr. Thackeray has already suffered himself partially to correct his crude way of viewing human nature. . . . But the old vice still remains; but the consequence of a false method of treatment founded upon it is, that with all our admiration for the writing of Esmond, we read it from the first page to the last without receiving in our minds, from any character or scene depicted in it, a distinct impression of vitality. We cannot persuade ourselves that there is a single character described at any length in this history which could belong to any being made of flesh and blood.

He is concerned, too, that Thackeray should seem to him to hang over his characters "too much as their creator and their judge." Far from having distanced himself by telling the story through Esmond, he believes that Thackeray's presence is inescapable: he is either like a God to men, or a puppet-master to his puppets:

> There is not a character in Esmond, not the most spotless, over which we do not constantly feel that Mr. Thackeray is bending with a smile of pity; turning up now and then the prettiest coat, to show some dirt upon the lining; exhibiting to us something adorable, that he may

> aggravate our perception in it of something detestable; laying down for us such consolatory doctrine as that kindness and meanness are both manly; producing for his own satisfaction, in a word, mere distortions and unnatural defects, - all because the wires are held by him, and it is his sovereign will and pleasure to show the working of his men and women thoroughly.

The principle that Thackeray falls back upon, Forster suggests, is "that in everybody there is some part bad, and that for truth's sake the bad portion must not be kept out of sight." Forster continues: "Now, we are not of those who would have it to be kept out of sight. Faultless monsters never have been drawn by the best novelists; but he must observe the world generously, and with abundant sympathy, moving among the characters he notices not as their judge but their companion, who would acquire a delicate perception of those shades of opinion and feeling which are found most commonly in combination with each other."

Thackeray, according to Forster's point of view, is thus not only too cynical, but he is not subtle enough.

It is not merely that Forster's optimism is outraged by Thackeray; it is arguable, from his point of view, that there is a genuine sense in which human nature does share something with divine nature, that it is false to show it otherwise, and that, as he says in this review, society is not "a gay fair in which every man puts forward what is best in him" only to "hide" the worst— "his raggedness." It is arguable, and certainly Forster would have argued, that Thackeray neither understood the society of his time, nor understood human nature.

Once he really turns to argued criticism, as in this review, Forster shows that he can use the illustrative quotation to make a point rather than simply to fill a page. For example, he refuses to accept the plausibility of the presentation of Steele in the novel (quoting the three paragraphs in book I, chapter 15, beginning: "Captain and Mrs. Steele, who were the first to arrive . . ."[1]), and gives with better critical effect, the description of Marlborough (book I, chapter 9[2]), which he finds "painted in the most impossible way, without a shade between coal black and lily white. Over and over again," Forster continues, "the traits recur, in this portraiture, which we cannot but regard as quite incompatible with any consistent theory of man's nature."

Forster makes much the same point about Beatrix, arguing that she could never have analysed herself as she does in the novel, if such were her nature (He quotes from book III, chapter 3, three paragraphs beginning, "Part of her coquetry may have come from . . ."[3] and from book III, chapter 4, "I intend to live to be a hundred" to "wagging her arch head."[4]).

Yet there is, clearly enough, a sense in which Forster's criticism is unbending and unreasonable as well as unappreciative. We, in fact see Marlborough as Henry Esmond sees

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[1]W. M. Thackeray, Works, Biographical Edn., 13 vols. (1898-9), VII, 278-9.

[2]Ibid., 215-6.

[3]Ibid., 318-9.

[4]Ibid., 329-31.

his chief, and it could be argued that this is surely how Esmond saw him, not as Thackeray did; although, Forster would perhaps have replied that his criticism was that no distinction is made or implied. In choosing to discuss the portrayal of Beatrix, moreover, we have her shown through Esmond's recreation of her through her own speech, as he remembers it. Clearly it never entered Esmond's head (nor Thackeray's) that there could be any distinction between Beatrice as she was shown by a third-person narrator, and Beatrice as Esmond chooses to recall her. Forster and Thackeray alike accept the common fictional convention, that Esmond can recall Beatrix's own elaborate self-analysis as she expresses it to her cousin. But Forster maintains his point that Thackeray's method of working out a character is wrong, because fundamentally he does not demonstrate that he understands human nature: "Where there is anything good, he says, there must be something bad; that is the nature to which I must be true. But he does not, because from his point of view he cannot, see what the faults and follies are which harmonize with any character of goodness." He then continues, in disagreement with what Thackeray had written to Bell (see above p.34):

> Tom Jones with his careless vices would no more have been capable of letting Sophia's pet bird escape, than Blifil with his prudent virtues could have fallen into doubtful relations with Lady Bellaston. Every real character is a consistent whole. There are faults that attend necessarily upon the unusual development of certain virtues; others that can, others that cannot, consist with certain forms of excellence; and the combinations, as they exist in each real character, produce a whole so complete, that no one ingredient can be put away without causing a change in the balance of the rest. When we read

> Fielding, we enter into the society of men and women all of whom we know as well as we know our own friends in flesh and blood. They stir before us, subject now to one emotion, now to another, each acting on all occasions, upon impulses thoroughly consistent, and so displayed that the whole sum of them when put together, make up a character with all its strong and weak points properly proportioned. Such a fictitious person becomes real to us. If he did not live and breathe in the world, he lived and breathed in the works of Fielding, which were nothing but the world of his own time and country put into the form of writing. Compared to such creations we too often find in Mr. Thackeray's works dream figures only, almost always brilliant or grotesque, almost always impossible.

Forster seems to make the breath-taking assumption that Fielding's novels are <u>nothing but</u> the world of his time "put into the world of writing;" but it is a critical view which he qualifies by saying that its interest also lies in Fielding's dramatisation and depiction of characters who act as we know men and women do in a society not dissimilar from our own.

Forster continues to pursue the common assumption of those who preferred Thackeray, that just because Thackeray is cynical, therefore he is somehow realistic, true to life, and possessed of a sound grasp of human nature. This is why, though "brilliant and grotesque," if his characters are "impossible," he has failed.

He relents only to quote some rather sententious passages, and to praise them for "being manly and beautiful," "charmingly written," and as doing "justice to the writer's finer nature." The cynic is caught simpering, and Forster picks out these passages for praise, only to return to declare that the love of Esmond and Lady Castlemaine is "incredible, and there an end on't." He is far from leaving it even then,

and does so only after remarking of all the characters that "incongruities more or less appear . . . to spoil them all . . . the effect of each figure is unreal." They are marred, he suggests, by the same incongruity as Esmond's portrait (in the novel) as painted by Mr. Jarvis: he is shown "in his red coat, and smiling upon a bomb-shell, which was bursting at a corner of the piece."[1]

Three more extracts are given which were intended to exemplify "the good writing of Esmond . . . the work, in many respects, of a master's hand," with Forster's final judgment that it, nevertheless, "incurs the risk of perishing, because the genius and labour in it are spent upon ill-chosen material." "Mr. Thackeray," he closes, "is to a great extent writing upon sand while he is founding books on his present notions of society."

This review of Henry Esmond is one of his most thorough pieces in its combined attention to the work in hand, and in its attempt to state his own critical beliefs and to test them against the assumptions that he asserts lay behind Thackeray's practice.

The Examiner's next major review of a work of Thackeray's, however, offers a remarkable contrast with this notice of Esmond. This is the review of The Newcomes (1855).[2] In the first place, it is easily the most friendly and generous review of one of Thackeray's major works to appear in the

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[1] Works, VII, 272 (book II, chapter 15).

[2] Examiner (1 September 1855), pp. 548-9.

journal up to that time. It is true that through most of 1855 and up until at least 1858, Forster and Thackeray were on dining terms with each other,[1] but it is still a surprise to find a review in the Examiner at this time praising any work of Thackeray's for its "broad and generous spirit," its "good humour and fun," its "genial forbearance," its "frequent appeal to sentiment," and for its representation of "what is best in our imperfect humanity." There is more in the same tone.

A probable explanation for this complete change in attitude is that Forster did not write the review at all. He may have been on friendly enough terms with the novelist at the time, and he may have recognised that the book itself was more acceptable from his point of view; nevertheless, it would surely have been out of character for him to admit as much as he does here, or as freely, without even so much as an "I told you so". There is also certainly nothing in the review itself to indicate that Forster wrote it, and because it clashes so dramatically with his earlier opinions about Thackeray's view of human nature, we cannot make the assumption.

Indeed, the review was far more likely to have been written by Henry Morley,[2] who had gradually been taking over the literary and theatrical reviewing in the journal from Forster from as early as mid-July 1851. He had been allowed

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[1] Letters of Thackeray, III, passim.

[2] See below, p.203,n. 2.

to review the works of a number of Forster's friends, with a fairly free hand, and seems also to have been the most likely reviewer of Dickens's later novels. All this is documented in some detail below (pp. 203-9), and it only needs to be pointed out here that it was characteristic of Morley to emphasise the construction of a work of art, which he felt should ideally have a unity or harmony "produced by a clear reference of all its parts to the point of view from which the whole picture is taken,"[1] and which should be based upon "some simple and essential truth of life."[2] Now, this is also essentially the view emphasised in this review of The Newcomes:

> . . . every . . . defect may be readily forgiven for that great excellence on which we have chiefly dwelt, and for which we regard it as Mr. Thackeray's best work. The theme is worthy of the power spent upon it. Through its substance is infused a great human truth well worth the vigorous enforcing it receives. Not that we much care for any amount of supposed good that a novel may do, for we do not argue after the fashion of the tract distributors: our view is more that of the artist than the moralist. It may do good, no doubt; and the more the better; but the true view of a work of art is that there should be in it a unity of meaning, and that it should mean something worthy of the effect, manifested in it by the artist. Nor is this more true of any one than of the satirist.

Unfortunately, even if we accept that Morley probably did write this review, until we can determine just how much licence he was allowed in his reviewing for the Examiner (and

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[1]Henry Morley, English Writers: an Attempt towards a History of English Literature, 11 vols. (1887), X, 153.

[2]Henry Morley, Of English Literature in the Reign of Victoria with a Glance at the Past (Leipzig, 1881), p. 379.

we suspect that he was very much his own man), we cannot be certain as to whether or not Forster approved of this, or of any particular review written by him. It may even be that Forster had some hand or say in its composition. We may never know.[1]

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When considering Forster's reviews of Vanity Fair and Henry Esmond, it is important to keep in mind that his criticisms of them relating to Thackeray's "grave defect" were perfectly consistent with what he had written elsewhere in the Examiner on other occasions.[2] But it must also be admitted that he was undoubtedly more severe than he otherwise would have been, had the two men enjoyed better relations at the time the reviews were written. Perhaps this state of affairs was fortunate for us, however, because these two reviews accordingly show not only what Forster really thought of Thackeray's mature fiction, but they also reveal a major strand of Forster's critical and personal point of view that was central to his reviewing throughout his time with the Examiner-- a strand that has particular relevance when it

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[1]Similarly, we cannot assume that Forster had any hand in the notices of The Rose and the Ring and volume one of Miscellanies: Prose and Verse, Examiner (16 December 1854), pp. 797-8, and (3 November 1855), p. 692. Both notices are very generous in their observations, but neither are important or particularly interesting from a critical point of view.

[2]For example: 6 June 1846, p. 340; 3 July 1847, p. 419; 12 February 1848, p. 101; 19 August 1848, p. 533; 14 April 1849, p. 159; 1 December 1849, p. 758; and 19 October 1850, p. 672.

comes to his reviewing of the fiction of Mrs. Gaskell and Dickens.[1]

Forster clearly did not fully appreciate Thackeray's later more pessimistic works, and although this does not necessarily make him a bad critic of his fiction, it does underline what will be brought out when we examine his criticism of the fiction of others: that his Unitarian liberalism was out of sympathy with any unconstructive view of society such as he saw Thackeray's to be. In fact, a comparison of his reviews of Thackeray's fiction with those of Bulwer-Lytton's in the next chapter, offers an interesting and revealing contrast in this respect, for unlike Thackeray, Lytton was never really other than an optimist in his fiction.

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[1]See below, chapters 5, 6 and 7.

# CHAPTER 3

## FORSTER AND BULWER-LYTTON

### I

Forster and Bulwer-Lytton first became acquainted during 1832 over their mutual efforts to help the impecunious Leigh Hunt. By 1834 they had become close friends, and except for occasional differences remained so until Lytton's death in 1873.

Their actual relationship in many ways paralleled that of Forster's to Dickens, for Forster was not simply Bulwer-Lytton's closest friend, but he was also for much of the time -- as in the case of Dickens --his literary adviser and agent.

It is easy to understand the affinity between them. They shared the same strongly held views about the dignity of the profession of letters, they shared the same love of the theatre, their view of fiction and drama was essentially the same, they both idolised Macready, and they both had friends in common. But above all, Forster genuinely thought that Lytton was a literary genius in some ways comparable to Shakespeare. Lytton, in his turn, probably recognised amongst other things, the stability in Forster that he lacked in his own life, and no doubt realised that Forster was a most useful person to have around him.

Yet a full account of their relationship, and that of Forster's to Lytton's son (to whom he was more like a father) would obscure the chief purpose of this chapter, which is to examine Forster's reviews of the fiction of Bulwer-Lytton.

Lytton's novels, during the period that we are concerned with, fall into three major categories: the Newgate novels, the historical novels, and the novels of ordinary life. This chapter will accordingly deal with them in that order, as being the most logical.

II

Before going on to examine Forster's reviews of Lytton's Newgate fiction, it will help us if we can see them in the context of what he thought in general of this kind of fiction. Yet, in the first place, it must be admitted that while we may be reasonably certain (because of correspondence) that he reviewed most of Lytton's novels in the journal, we cannot be certain that he was responsible for writing all of the notices of Newgate fiction not written by Lytton. Fortunately, however, there seems to be no contradictions between those we know to have been written by Forster and those we cannot be certain of. All we can say for now, is that Forster probably noticed the bulk of the novels we are going to mention below, and that anyway, judging by the review of Jack Sheppard, which seems to have been a sort of critical manifesto written by several hands (see Appendix C), there seems to have been a general policy towards such fiction in the journal.

Broadly speaking, from Forster's point of view, the Newgate novel fell mainly into two categories: those seen to have a positive artistic, moral, or political intention, novels such as Jonathan Wild (1743), Paul Clifford (1830) or Oliver Twist (1838), and those without-- ranging from the

near pornographic to such works as Ainsworth's Rookwood (1834), or his Jack Sheppard (1839).

However, there was also a sort of moral no-man's-land between Oliver Twist and Jack Sheppard, which provided plenty of critical controversy, and as we might expect, Forster found himself caught up in it.

We might expect it, because he was known, as a critic, to be a moralist. In fact-- without excusing his occasional irrationalities and biases in this respect --other things being equal, it is probably a perfectly valid part of the critic's province to ask the writer to conform to certain standards in morality. It is also reasonable for a critic to ask that a writer avoid confusion in his implicit opinions about morality.[1] Emphatically, no one can say that a stand on morality is irrelevant, for it was frequently part of the subject of the Victorian novel-- particularly of the Newgate novel; it was related to the plot, and to the author's views of society. If it is wrongly treated, then it is open to criticism.

Another reason for Forster's particular concern with morality in the Newgate novel, is that it was Lytton's books that occasioned the most bitter controversy, and the Examiner, as we shall see below, naturally hastened to his defence.

One of Forster's criticisms of the less reputable Newgate novels was that he thought that their glamourising of crime and the criminal, undermined law and order, especially

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[1] Wayne C. Booth discusses this in his The Rhetoric of Fiction (Chicago, 1965), pp. 377-398.

among sections of the lower classes. This was a natural and common enough middle-class reaction, particularly during a time of considerable public unrest and increasing lawlessness. In the same way, it is likely that Forster's opposition to such publications can also be seen as a reflection of the Examiner's editorial opposition to Radical militancy. For, from the middle-class point of view, much of the Newgate fiction being published during the late thirties and throughout the forties must have seemed often to be just another aspect of that lawlessness which was being witnessed around them in the Swing and Chartist riots, and in the democratic uprisings on the Continent. In fact the two must often seem to have been closely associated, and whether they were or not, the Times at least saw it in this way. In a politically motivated editorial it blamed Lytton's Newgate novels for much of the current social unrest during 1841. The editorial claimed that because of the "false moral principles" that his novels were chiefly responsible for spreading, "Socialism and Chartism" had "sprung up and become rank and thriving weeds. . . ."[1]

The prominence of G. W. M. Reynolds, author of the widely read Mysteries of London (1845-6),[2] among the physical force Chartists, must have added greatly to such a conviction, to say nothing of the implicit connection between the Radical press and the more scurrilous cheap fiction which often

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[1] The Times (17 November 1841), p. 4. See also, below, pp. 81.

[2] Issued in 624 penny numbers between 1845 and 1846; published in two volumes in 1847.

included Newgate fiction of the worst sort.[1]

Another reason for Forster's dislike of the more morally questionable class of Newgate novel, was based on artistic grounds. For not only were most of them hurriedly and carelessly written, but because of their very nature, they largely ignored any real concern with the moral balance that Forster insisted on, and (as we saw in the previous chapter) found wanting in much of Thackeray's fiction. Further, as well as seeing the shoddiness through the veneered morality and appreciable artistry of many of the works of writers such as G. W. M. Reynolds, G. P. R. James, and Ainsworth, he considered that their worst damage was inflicted on the uneducated masses through cheap pirated reprints, near-pornographic imitiations, and hurriedly dramatised versions in the theatre, not to speak of the easy access to such publications or performances.

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[1]This connection is seen most clearly in George W. M. Reynolds (1814-79; DNB), who wrote sensational novels aimed mostly at the lower classes. Many of these novels-- of which Mysteries of London is representative --are occasionally semi-pornographic, and replete with Radical sentiments. His Chartist sympathies are also clear in his journals: Reynolds's Miscellany, Reynolds's Political Instructor, and Reynolds's Weekly Newspaper.

He became a Chartist leader in 1848, when he distinguished himself by chairing two open-air meetings at Trafalgar Square (6 March 1848) and at Covent Garden (27 February 1849). Both meetings ended in police intervention-- the first in a full-scale riot.

Dickens, whose works had been plagiarised by Reynolds, suggests the connection between this kind of fiction and Chartism, when he referred to him in the Examiner ("A Recorder's Charge", 3 March 1849, p. 130) as the "author of the Mysteries of London, and of the Revolution of Trafalgar Square." Again, the Examiner quoted an extract from the Daily News which described the Mysteries of London as follows: "If it be possible to conceive of anything more miserable, murderous, immoral, and reprehensible than the succession of scenes which constitute that darling of the Parisian boulevarts [a reference to Eugene Sue's Mysteries of Paris] --that grosser conception will give an idea of what the mysteries of the modern Babylon are like." Examiner, (6 November 1847), p. 709.

See also, Margaret Daziel, Popular Fiction 100 Years Ago (1957), pp. 35-45.

In the Examiner, for example, there is a reference to the adaptations of Jack Sheppard, "that are alike rife in the low smoking-rooms, the common barber's shops, the cheap reading places, the private booksellers', and the minor theatres." The article goes on to complain that,

> Jack Sheppard is the attraction at the Adelphi; Jack Sheppard is the bill of fare at the Surrey; Jack Sheppard is the choice example of morals and conduct held forth to the young citizens at the City of London; Jack Sheppard reigns over the Victoria; Jack Sheppard rejoices crowds in the Pavilion; Jack Sheppard is the favourite at the Queen's; and at Sadler's Wells there is no profit but of Jack Sheppard. . . . All the original insignificance of the thing is lost, in the pernicious influences that are set at work around it.[1]

Although Forster did not write all of this article himself, as I have pointed out in Appendix C, he certainly shared its views. On both counts: the theatrical adaptations, and the reprints and imitations, he had long-standing personal aversions, for he was a keen advocate for a cheaper and more informative press as a means of educating the working-classes. Also, dating from the time of a childhood essay written in defence of the theatre,[2] he was, eventually -- with Lytton and Macready --one of the foremost champions for a more artistically responsible theatre. Both of these causes (not to speak of the dignity of the profession of letters itself) could be seen as being undermined by the more purely sensational Newgate novel and its even more

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[1] Examiner (3 November 1839), p. 691. See also below, Appendix C.

[2] John Forster, "A Few Thoughts in Vindication of the Stage", Newcastle Magazine (June 1827).

degenerate offspring.

Thus, in view of all of the foregoing, in 1834, Forster, reviewing Ainsworth's Rookwood (partly based on the life of Dick Turpin), objects to his inartistic "free use of coffins, corpses, and skeleton hands" and to his other "horrors of this mouldy kind, all turning on the idea of death." He also objects to the favourable portrayal of Turpin "whom the writer is pleased with loving familiarity to call Dick," for "the highwayman and his slang are presented as if in themselves they had some claim to admiration." He continues: "Doubtless, we shall soon see Thurtell[1] presented in sublime guise, and the drive to Gill's Hill described with all pomp and circumstance." All this was quite unpalatable to Forster: "There are people who may like this sort of thing, but we are not of the number. Indeed we have found it extremely difficult to read the book." He goes on to find the book "peculiarly distasteful" but admits that it has "passages of power and spirit," and that it had "its admirers among persons whose judgement cannot be denied weight."[2]

Yet the Examiner was even less tolerant in 1839, when -- at the prompting of Fonblanque --Forster, or Dickens (or both),[3] wrote of Ainsworth's Jack Sheppard: "It is . . . so bad . . . that the silence we meant to preserve upon the

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[1]John Thurtell (1774-1824; DNB), son of the mayor of Norwich; prize-fighter and gambler; murdered William Weare, to whom he had lost money; executed 9 January 1824.

[2]Examiner (18 May 1834), p.308.

[3]See below, Appendix C.

subject would be almost as great a compromise with truth as the morals of the book or the puffs of the bookseller." A year later, at the instance of Courvoisier's claim that Ainsworth's novel had incited him to the murder, the Examiner with its worst fears apparently confirmed, returned to the subject in a leader to find the book, "a publication calculated to familiarise the mind with cruelities, and to serve as the cut-throat's manual, or the mid-night assassin's vade mecum."[1] The chief complaint was that "the admiration of the criminal is the studied purpose of the book."

This was essentially the same complaint made, in the Examiner of Mary Shelley's Falkner: "We have written upon this book with the disgust it has inspired. The design is to obtain a spurious sympathy for a criminal. . . ."[2]

Two other Newgate novels, published in 1846 and in 1855, were also condemned in the journal because they exhibited "in a heroic light those qualities which any youthful invader of his master's till might possess," and render "attractive those exploits that any lubberly ruffian might achieve."[3] The first was Chronicles of the Fleet Prison,[4] "a collection

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[1]Examiner (28 June 1840), p. 402. This is attributed to Albany Fonblanque in his Life and Labours (pp. 428-9), by his nephew. He gives no authority for so doing, but it is certainly written in his style.

[2]Ibid. (12 February 1837), p. 101.

[3]Examiner (18 January 1845), p. 37.

[4]Charles Rowcroft, Chronicles of "the Fleet Prison," from the Papers of the late Alfred Seedy, 3 vols. (1846).

Forster probably objected mostly to the two tales, The Turnkey's Daughter and The Young Noble. The former deals with the attempted prison escapes of a young debtor. The turnkey's daughter, who falls in love with him, assists him in his efforts. The latter tale deals with the affairs of

of half a dozen tales . . . readable for the most part," but criticised because much of its subject matter which "had a practical and beneficial bearing ten years ago, on the evils, inequalities, and cruelties of our laws of debtor and creditor, now smacks only of misplaced sympathy and a very dangerous sentimentality."[1] The other was Paul Ferroll[2] in which Forster (or another) found "cleverness . . . power . . ." and "much art," but also embarrassment, "as to what to say . . . of the little tale" before him. He writes:

> Though not strait-laced as to the moralities of fiction, we cannot affect such an utter indifference to them as this writer seems to feel. Without stickling for the exact proprieties in all respects, there are broad limits between good and evil that should never be confounded. Nor can any author fall into a more grievous mistake, a mistake more injurious both to authors and readers, than to mix up detestable actions with motives that have an air of generosity and nobleness about them. . . . [The hero] commits the murder [of his wife] with what we may call perfect success, and a result in all respects satisfactory-- for eighteen years at least. He marries his second wife and is perfectly happy . . . in such happiness as falls rarely to the lot of innocent man. Here, therefore, is a sort of teaching by example which would seem to hold out a really charming prospect to people of incompatible tempers who have nerve enough to carry such a divorce bill. . . . Not that the author can bring herself to exhibit this wife-killing hero in his proper attitude at Tyburn. She manages an escape for him. . . .[3]

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an irresponsible debtor, Lord Narcissus Scamp, who far from being abashed by his imprisonment, carries on his riotous living within the prison walls. Finally, in order to preserve appearances, his family pay enough of his debts to free him.

[1] Examiner (28 November 1846), p. 757.

[2] Anon, Paul Ferroll: a Tale (1855).

[3] Examiner (8 September 1855), p. 565.

Forster also held reservations about several other novels which incorporated elements of the Newgate theme. He censured Ferrers (1841),[1] for example because artistically it was "a bad subject: an ill-chosen hero."[2] The hero, Earl Ferrers (who also appears in the Newgate Calendar), exhibits strong symptoms of insanity, and Forster suggests that "once suppose him really mad . . . all the surprises of fiction are at end: there is nothing extraordinary or appalling that may not be looked for, as a matter of course." He also criticised the author's "tendency to extract a 'sensation' out of every possible source, especially the fearful," and complains that "too many Newgate crimes are ushered in with more storm, earthquake, and comet, than suits the dignity of such harbingers." Nevertheless, he also willingly admits that because of the author's use of facts, and his inventive imagination, the over-all result is "an interesting book," in which (among the other meritorious qualities he lists) there is "no compromise of the selfish cruelties of the hero."

The Fortunes of Woman (1849),[3] whose "narrator and heroine . . . is a sort of female Gil Blas,"[4] came under Forster's censure for "the pre-eminence given to this person, and the disagreeable success with which the character is kept

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[1]Charles Ollier, Ferrers: a Romance of the Reign of George the Second (1841).

[2]Examiner (20 November 1841), p. 741.

[3]Miss Lamont, The Fortunes of Woman: Memoirs, 3 vols. (1849).

[4]Examiner (11 August 1849), p. 501.

up." Actually, the whole review could be equally applied to his view of Thackeray's Vanity Fair,[1] after which the novel was obviously modelled. It is even possible that he reviewed the book, because he saw it as another opportunity to confirm his distaste of Thackeray's view of society. For he writes:

> The author has a quick eye for the detection of faults and follies. The weakness and vices of individuals are painfully prominent in her pictures. The impression left by the society in which we are brought to move is that of preponderating rascality, relieved by abrupt and therefore unnatural contrasts of transcendent virtue and amiability . . . . When, as in the present instance . . . the real world of men and women around us sit for the portraits or suggest the fancy sketches, the unloving tone of the fiction, and the predilection it evinces for dwelling upon morbid and diseased symptoms, too frequently transcend those limits of the pleasurable beyond which it is not warrantable for the artist to go.

Forster continues, approving of "some of the characters introduced, and many of the remarks with which the narrative is interspersed," claiming that they "denote powers of healthier and more cordial observation, and that high-toned sagacity which borders on imaginative wisdom." He concludes-- almost as he had done in his review of Vanity Fair --with the hope that "when next we meet we shall find her allowing more free play to her generous and kindly inspirations, and producing a book which, without being less true, will be less forced in its situations, less desultory in its themes, more winning, and leaving behind it memories upon which the mind may dwell with greater and more lasting pleasure."

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[1] See above, pp.32-4.

Reginald Hastings (1850),[1] an historical novel, came under fire from Forster, chiefly because the author did not follow historical fact closely enough. Yet it particularly seems to have annoyed him that the hero, the murderer of the Duke of Buckingham, who in fact "expiated his crime at Tyburn, and afterwards swung in chains at Portsmouth," should here be reanimated "to make a grim, mysterious, puritanical hero . . . for no purpose apparent . . . that any other crop-ear" would have done as well. He also objects to the "murders, sudden deaths, and other violences," of which "a constant familiarity quite strips them of their terrors."[2]

He tempers his criticism, however, by conceding that the author has "imagination and fluency, knowledge of life as well as of its deeper emotions, great subtlety and beauty of reflection, and a proper sense of the dignity of his art." He concludes flatteringly that "It is difficult not to derive some kind of information and pleasure from even the least successful scenes in the book we have been criticising."

Placing this last review in its context of 1850, during the prolonged quarrel (ostensibly over the dignity of letters) between Thackeray and Forster, it is tempting to see the influence of that quarrel in both this and in the previously quoted review, particularly in comments such as the above one which is in stark contrast with anything he was prepared to say about Thackeray's work during this time.

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[1] Eliot Warburton, Reginald Hastings; or, a Tale of the Troubles in 164- (1850).

[2] Examiner (27 April 1850), p. 261.

Finally, he finds Linny Lockwood (1853)[1] to be a book which is "too much made up of incidents of theft, seduction, suicide, and sordid misery," and (even more damning from his point of view), one which "involves not a little bewilderment of plain notions of right and wrong."[2]

On the other hand, although Forster firmly believed that it was a part of the business of the critic "to expose the tendency of a mischievous publication, to lay bare the means it uses for the attainment of it, and to call its means if unfair, its object if malevolent, by the proper name,"[3] he was prepared to commend that class of Newgate fiction genuinely written from a genuinely artistic, moral, or political point of view. "A book is not to be judged without careful regard to its intention. . . ." he says in a good-natured review of Phineas Quiddy (1842).[4] He continues: "We need not be chary of meddling with what is low, when real good is to be got from it: we may safely encounter a large experience of the region of rascaldom, when we feel that we assist in its thorough exposure."[5]

Again, underlining his (and the Examiner's) concern with national education, he writes approvingly of a republication of Defoe's Colonel Jack: ". . . De Foe's object, in writing it, was to show the thousand miseries and crimes that wait on the absence of education, in those whom nature had designed to

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[1] Catherine Crowe, Linny Lockwood (1853).

[2] Examiner (24 December 1853), p. 821.

[3] Examiner (11 December 1847), p. 787.

[4] John Poole, Phineas Quiddy; or Sheer Industry (1842).

[5] Examiner (17 December 1842), p. 805.

have been even the happiest and the most virtuous."[1] Moll Flanders, republished in the same series, is also praised because "There are no highway heroics in it . . . its simple moral at the last, after its burning and bleeding lesson of the hideousness of crime, is to teach us that "no case can be so low . . . but that unwearied industry will go a great way towards deliverance from it, and in time raise the meanest creature to appear again in the world.'"[2] Finally, he approves of Men and Women (1843),[3] because although dealing with a murder the interest of the book does not include "false criminal excitements, or Old Bailey sentiment."[4] Moreover, he continues, "Crime is not at all inviting here: it receives and renders justice . . . its careless slight beginnings are marked for exposure and remorse. . . . In all this there is a just moral aim, and purpose of no commonplace kind."

In summary, assuming that Forster wrote most of these notices, and that he agreed in general with those that he did

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[1] Ibid. (5 January 1840), p. 5.

[2] Ibid. (29 March 1840), p. 198. In his essay, "Daniel De Foe" (Edinburgh Review, October, 1845), he seems to have partially changed his view of both Colonel Jack and Moll Flanders. He writes: "Moll Flanders, . . . Colonel Jack, . . . and . . . Roxana, are . . . examples of wonderful genius. In their day . . . they had no unwise or hurtful effect; for certainly they had a tendency to produce a more indulgent morality, and larger fair play to bad and good. That we question the wisdom of now reviving them as they were written, we will frankly confess." The fact that he was writing in the more conservative Edinburgh Review might help to account for this apparent shift. Alternatively, it is possible that either Forster changed his mind along with the general hardening of public opinion against Newgate fiction, or that he did not write the notice in the Examiner.

[3] , Men and Women; or, Manorial Rights (1843).

[4] Examiner (16 December 1843), p. 788.

not write, we can see that although he was not prudish about the Newgate novel, he insisted on certain standards of art and morality. He also recognised that although the Newgate theme was a legitimate, even sometimes a desirable subject, it was one that needed to be treated with great care.

III

In turning to Forster's criticism of Lytton's Newgate fiction, it appears that his almost whole-hearted support of it was in general quite consistent with what he had said about the Newgate novel elsewhere in the Examiner. Yet, it is also all too obvious that he was frequently prepared to overlook what he surely would have considered to be errors of art or morality in another's work.

This bias can be seen in his brief notice of a new edition of Paul Clifford (1840). He opens the notice by quoting approvingly from a part of Lytton's new preface, which emphasises the author's intention "to draw attention to . . . a vicious Prison discipline and a sanguinary Criminal Code . . . and . . . to show that there is nothing essentially different between vulgar vice and fashionable vice. . . ."[1] He goes on to find the passage "well said," and the book itself "in the true spirit of that glorious writer [Fielding] to whose wise and healthy school Paul Clifford belongs."[2] He then selects for praise the "youthful,

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[1] Edward Bulwer-Lytton, The Novels, Library Edn., 41 vols. (1859-62), V, vii-viii. This edition hereafter cited as Novels.

[2] Examiner (30 August 1840), p. 550.

bouyant," and "delightful spirit" of the book, the "easy, natural," and "impulsive" characters, the "well-sustained" plot, and finally, "the reflections" which "whether brilliant with point or solid with feeling, are always distinguished by most practical good sense."

Much of this praise is deserved, and must have seemed even more so compared to what could have been said of similar novels being written during that time. In fact without trying to claim too much for it, the book is still very readable, and for a minor novel, is often quite entertaining. Again, Forster was on the whole right when he pronounced the novel not to be one of those "which on the one hand show the vulgarity of vice, and on the other hold up its false pretensions to heroism or its sickening cravings for sympathy."[1] Yet, it is clear that on this morality issue, Forster overlooks much that he would have condemned had Paul Clifford been written by almost anyone else.

He overlooks such passages as this, which for all Lytton's good intentions reads much like anything in Rookwood:

> --"Heavens!" cried he [Pepper] looking upward at the starry skies in a sort of ecstasy, "What a jolly life this is! Some fellows like hunting; d-- it! what hunting is like the road? If there be sport in hunting down a nasty fox, how much more is there in hunting down a nice clean nobleman's carriage! If there be joy in getting a brush, how much more is there in getting a purse! If it be pleasant to fly over a hedge in the broad daylight, hang me if it be not ten times finer sport to skim it by night, --here goes! Look how the hedges run away from us! and the silly old moon dances about, as if the sight of us put the good lady in spirits! Those old

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[1] Ibid.

maids are always glad to have an eye upon such a fine dashing figure."[1]

Most of the passages written in this vein, and the two expunged in the third and later editions,[2] were part of the political satire or reformatory intention, but like this extract, they cannot all be fully justified on this count if one accepts Forster's usual premises.

Further, even allowing for Lytton's poorly supported and not very convincing suggestion, in the novel, that Paul Clifford and his companions were driven to crime by circumstances outside their control, it does seem inconsistent that Forster should overlook the fact that in this novel, crime does ultimately pay. This neglect seems even more noticeable in the light of those instances that cannot easily be explained in the light of the book's declared objectives.

For example, one of the characters, Mr. Pepper, a highwayman, was finally captured and sentenced to seven years transportation. He profits so well from his sentence, the result of a lucrative career of crime, that while in Australia, he "made an excellent match, built himself an excellent house, and remained in 'the land of the Blessed' to the end of his days. . . ." It is not made at all clear whether he was reformed, or how he "so advantageously employed his time at Botany Bay, and arranged things there so comfortably to

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[1] Novels, VI, 104 (Chapter 26).

[2] These were character sketches of Fighting Attie (The Duke of Wellington) who "robbed his man without chicanery; and took his purse by applying for it, rather than scheming," and Gentleman George (King George IV) who had his "hand constantly in the public purse." Novels, VI, 317-22 (Appendix).

himself."[1]

Again, only a little less difficult to justify morally, is the good fortune of the hero, Paul Clifford. For, after years of profitable crime, the proceeds of which enabled him to carry on an intriguing courtship in high society, he was eventually captured and transported for life, only to escape, marry the beautiful heiress, and live happily ever after in riches, marital bliss, and a newly assumed virtue.[2]

The same sort of treatment, morally questionable from Forster's usual point of view, is also apparent in the outcome of the criminal activities of Dummie Dunnaker, the petty extortioner, and in the successful and unrequited career of Augustus Tomlinson, the philosophical highwayman.[3]

There is, therefore, no doubt that the robbers and their exploits are occasionally portrayed without apparent irony, or moral commentary, in a genuinely heroic light, and that, in general, the ultimate outcome of their crimes is-- to say the least --not unpleasant. Yet it is also fair to say that the book considered in its full context as a roman à clef with political and reformist intentions, as well as a work of art, is hardly in the same morally irresponsible category as Ainsworth's Jack Sheppard, and Rookwood, or Mary Shelley's Falkner.

However, it was perhaps inevitable that such a book should, despite its good intentions, be open to criticism

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[1] Novels, VI, 311 (Chapter 36).

[2] Ibid., 314-15.

[3] Ibid., 310-12.

when it first appeared in 1830. Its writer was inexperienced, its Newgate setting questionable (by some) in such novice hands, its satire perhaps too undigested, and its objectives too many and too pretentious. Further, in the last half of the book particularly, it is noticeable that the artist's natural sympathy with his creations, and his love of story telling, also prevent his being able fully to sustain the irony and his avowed objectives.

Nevertheless, the novel was immensely popular,[1] and had a wide-spread influence on fiction and the theatre in the host of imitations that followed its success. Basically, it achieved this popularity because it catered to a public taste whetted by the crime reporting in the daily press--including the Examiner --and because it also has, in good measure and gusto, scenes from both extremes of the social scale, gothic sensationalism, romantic intrigue, the conventional revelation of aristocratic parentage, and a happy ending. Its topicality was probably the least contribution to its success.

Forster's observations, as we have seen suggest a degree of partisan bias. Yet he was reviewing the work of a close friend, a fellow champion of letters, a popular writer of genuine merit, and a political ally of the Examiner. Also, instrumental in causing Forster to overlook the moral lapses of the novel, must have been its anti-Tory and reformist objectives. He would have been a remarkable friend

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[1] "A larger first impression was printed than of any modern novel, and yet all sold on the day of publication." (Age, May 23, 1830.) Quoted in Michael Sadleir, Bulwer: A Panorama (1931), p. 228 n.

and journalist under the circumstances to have damned the novel by questioning its morals. Fonblanque would have been an even more remarkable Radical Whig editor to allow him to do so.

In his attitude towards Eugene Aram (1831), Forster again seems to be rationalising his usual attitude towards morality in the Newgate novel. For, from his usual point of view, the book is once more at fault.

Without going into the arguments of its critics, it will be sufficient to point out that the narrator of Eugene Aram again often appears to sympathise with his criminal hero, even if less obviously than in Paul Clifford. As Keith Hollinsworth puts it: although "Aram, never, not even at the end, seems morally heroic, it is possible to suppose at times that the author thinks him so. . . . First Clifford, then Aram. Bulwer had taken the side of the criminal again."[1]

Eugene Aram was first published before Forster joined the Examiner staff, and subsequent editions do not seem to have been noticed by the journal. However, Forster expressed some views in a letter to Lytton:

> I have read Eugene Aram with very great and greedy pleasure. Your view of his character is very original and . . . amazingly striking. . . . There is no lurching from it to the right or left. . . . Herein, I think consists the beauty of the book. . . . I could have wished that you had adhered a little more strictly to the small information we have of Eugene Aram, because I think the cause which he himself is reported to have assigned for the murder, namely that of jealousy of Clarke with his wife, is more likely

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[1]Keith Hollinsworth, The Newgate Novel, 1830-1847: Bulwer, Ainsworth, Dickens and Thackeray (Detroit, 1963), p. 92.

> to have urged him to the deed than mere gain, though I confess you put the last motive in a singularly novel way, and manage to make even it reputable. . . . Houseman's character is, I think, magnificently brought out all through, the way in which you bring about his betrayal of a knowledge of the resting-place of Clarke's bones is uncommonly fine. . . . Believe that I say this because I really felt your book.[1]

Although Forster did not apparently fully approve of Lytton's departure from the known facts about Aram's motive for committing the murder, there is no open suggestion in the letter that-- unlike many of the contemporary critics -- he is questioning the morality of the book.

In the Examiner itself, there are further brief mentions of the book-- none of them disapproving. In a review of the Caxtons (1849), Forster makes a passing reference to the "eloquent passion of . . . Eugene Aram. . . ."[2] Also, both Paul Clifford and Eugene Aram were included in the Examiner's two defences of Lytton's Newgate novels in 1841 and 1847.

The Examiner's review of Night and Morning (1841) is rather difficult to account for in view of all of the foregoing. Assuming that Forster wrote it, it would appear that after having read Lytton's manuscript, as well as having taken some pains over the legal aspects of the novel's dénouement,[3] he suddenly turned on the book and criticised it.

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[1] A compilation of two slightly different and incomplete versions of the letter, from Renton, pp. 139-40, and Sadleir, pp. 272-73. Sadleir gives the date as 4 January, 1832.

[2] Examiner (20 October 1849), p. 659.

[3] Letters, Forster to Bulwer-Lytton: 31 July 1840, and 3 August 1840. (Hertfordshire County Records Office).

Hollinsworth suggests that this was because its hero, Philip, was a Carlist officer for a while, and that the journal's general editor, Fonblanque, disapproved of this on political grounds, and perhaps did not like the novel in any case.[1] In support of the former argument are the Examiner's invectives against Charles X, and its championship of his opposition-- natural enough for most Liberals in those pre-Reform Act years. But the review was written in 1841, ten years after all this, four years after Charles himself had died in exile, and eight years after the Bill was passed. It is not likely that Fonblanque or Forster would criticise the novel of their colleague and friend simply because of its hero's brief connection with the old cause of the Carlists. Besides, even though there seems to be an ill-concealed admiration for Philip's Carlist companions,[2] Lytton makes it quite clear to his readers that he thought Philip understandably misguided. He does this in a passage that in some ways suggests his own reaction to the literary, political, and matrimonial "persecutions" that had marred his public image during the previous few years:

> He had suffered, and still suffered, too much from mankind, to have that philanthropy . . . which . . . generally springs from the studies we cultivate, not in the forum, but in the closet. Men, alas! too often lose the Democratic Enthusiasm in proportion as they find reason to suspect or despise their kind. . . . Moreover . . . he regarded the populace as a soldier enamoured of discipline and order usually does. His theories, therefore, or rather his ignorance of what is sound in theory,

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[1] Hollinsworth, pp. 172-4.

[2] Novels, XIII, 114-5 and 120 (book IV, chapter 2).

> went with Charles X in his excesses, but not with the timidity which terminated those excesses by dethronement and disgrace.[1]

There are, in fact, other possibilities, really more plausible than the simple explanation given by Hollinsworth. The first is that Forster criticised Lytton's novel, because he thought it bad. He thought it bad because he was a moralist; it put him in a difficult position, because he was known to be a moralist; he had criticised other men for faults that Lytton was now committing, and it really did undermine what theoretical views he had about the novel.

There is really little cause to doubt Forster's disapproval of the book on this ground. He makes it clear enough both in this review, and in an article referring back to it written six years later.[2]

There is no need to outline the story; but Forster makes it clear (with the help of well-chosen extracts) that the opening, with its tale of the two brothers, and the secret marriage of one of them, is certainly true and natural. It is only after the death of one of them, and the turn of the story away from rural England to Paris that he finds that falsity creeps in.

Forster admits that the book is "of extraordinary interest," with "touches worthy of the hand of Goldsmith" (a reference to the opening scenes) and that it will add to

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[1] Novels, XIII, 141 (book IV, chapter 5).

[2] In the later article, he concedes that "once and once only" he "thought" he had "perceived a tendency to the [moral] fault in one of Sir. E. B. Lytton's works, Night and Morning." Examiner (30 January 1847), pp. 66-7.

the author's reputation:

> Yet it must be pronounced inferior to Ernest Maltravers as a whole, and this because the purpose is not so steadily kept in view. Portions of it are of a much higher drift . . . but the level is not so evenly maintained. The sudden in-pouring of romance upon the natural current of a natural and common-life tale, carries away with it some sympathies that refuse to return, and vexes others with a shade of doubt as to their entire and perfect truthfulness. The hero never quite recovers his position after he has been connected with the man of crime who figures in the second volume, and in whom the limits between good and evil are scarcely marked throughout with sufficient clearness and precision. Upon these points there should be no possible doubt, for they imply the extreme danger of suggesting a false sympathy with crime. It is well observed by one of the modern novelists of France, Dans tous les cas, c'est une grande faute à un auteur de donner un principe généreux à des actions detestables. Any tendency to a moral miscarriage of that kind will be the more severely judged in a book of the power and genius of this, where the high standard by which it is tested and condemned, is already set up by the writer himself.[1]

Whether Forster was, or was not, a keen critic on this score, Lytton is open to criticism. In Gawtrey ("the man of crime" referred to in the extract), he was probably trying to repeat the success of Paul Clifford. Gawtrey turned to crime after the woman he loved had been seduced by Lord Lilburne. He saves her daughter, and orphaned granddaughter from a vicious life, by the fruits of his own criminal activities. At first he is a petty swindler, posing at different times as a money-lender, a physician, a hypnotist, a lawyer, a house-agent, and so on.[2] Later he turns to forgery and ultimately a double murder.[3]

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[1] Examiner (17 January 1841), p. 35.

[2] Novels, XII, 312-20 (book III, chapter 3).

[3] Ibid., XIII, 3-11 (book III, chapter 9).

Lytton intended his readers to understand that Gawtrey had turned to crime mainly as a consequence of his wrongs, both as man and boy, and that this reflects the way in which society itself responds to wrongs:

> "He was, in fact, the incarnation of that great spirit which the laws of the world raise up against the world, and by which the world's injustice, on a large scale, is awfully chastised; on a small scale, merely nibbled at and harassed . . . the spirit which, on a vast theatre, rises up, gigantic and sublime, in the heroes of war and revolution - in Mirabeaus, Marats, Napoleons; on a minor stage, it shows itself in demagogues, fanatical philosophers, and mob writers; and on the forbidden boards, before whose reeking lamps outcasts sit, at once audience and actors, it never produced a knave more consumate in his part, or carrying it off with more buskined dignity, than William Gawtrey.[1]

But Forster was clearly uncomfortable about the over-all portrayal of Gawtrey. For although he comments that the contrast between Lilburne (the "man of vice") and Gawtrey (the "man of crime") has its lesson, he thought that the story of the latter "should be read with care, and not without some protest against parts of its treatment. . . ." He continues: "The double murder in the forger's den . . . is an incident of confessed and inexcusable crime, and yet it is an aim in the after progress of the story (an aim which is surely very questionable) to keep sympathy alive for the murderer."

Forster also criticises the book for showing Philip, the hero, in poverty, acting in a way "not in accordance with that deep affection which characterises other parts of his conduct." When his mother dies, he burns his father's

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[1] Novels, XII, 322 (book III, chapter 4).

love-letters, and gives away his mother's clothes to a servant. Forster writes: "Now for the wardrobes of the rich, the four winds may claim them, and not one generous impulse of the heart be scattered or wasted in the division; but it is different with those of the poor." He adds: "It is to be here observed, at the same time, that the author may have had a settled purpose in throwing out traits of this kind here, for there is, throughout all that follows of the character, less of amiability than of wayward and ill-regulated impulse; but the result is not altogether agreeable, and tends to transfer the interest which Philip claims from us at first, to the account of other and inferior agents in the book."

As elsewhere, and not contemptibly, Forster (as this passage exemplifies) wants the novel to be true to human nature in characterisation. Again, in the review as a whole, he seems to be suggesting that misplaced or misdirected sympathies can be detrimental to the book itself, as well as to the reader. But there remains the doubt that this explanation for Forster's turning on the book is not enough; for, after all, he could presumably have overcome his critical and moral scruples if he had felt friendly enough to Lytton. It would surely have been almost as easy for him to rationalise the morality of almost any part of this novel, as it had been for him to do so with both Paul Clifford and Eugene Aram. But he did not choose to do so, and the evidence about this unaccustomed frankness, or apparent change in point of view, may also point towards a period of disillusionment with Lytton's political views.

For, although their differences cannot be set down as a disagreement about the Carlists, differences about politics in general may well have arisen between them already.

Renton was wrong in stating that up to 1845 Lytton's and Forster's "political sympathies were altogether and completely in harmony."[1] Forster's literary reviews of Lytton's works strongly suggest an underlying distrust and annoyance with his political views from as early as this review of Night and Morning (1841).

This is particularly noticeable in his reviews of Zanoni (1842) and The Last of the Barons (1843) the defects of which he asserts lie in their illiberal biases.[2]

Their correspondence even suggests a cooling off of the friendship. Apart from the fact that some of their letters might be expected to reflect their differences on political issues,[3] their frequency and relative impression of distance are in contrast with those of the previous four years. Probably only a part of this contrast can be put down simply

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[1] Renton, p. 141.

[2] See below, pp. 112-3 and 103-7.

[3] The correspondence between Forster and Lytton was too voluminous for me to read in full for this chapter, especially since most of it is still untranscribed. Nevertheless, a letter quoted in the Life of Edward Bulwer, First Lord Lytton, op. cit., II, 51-3, and dated 1 June 1842, may not be untypical; also, a letter from Lytton to Macready (27 April 1853) --quoted in Shattuck, p. 250 --complains that Lytton sees "nothing of Forster. He is so political that he always says something to hurt one's feelings."

to political differences, however. During 1836 to 1840, Lytton had been engaged in writing for the stage,[1] and Forster had been closely involved with matters relating to the writing and production of his plays. Forster's extensive theatrical experience, his close friendship with Macready (an actor essential to the success of Lytton's plays), his critical support in the Examiner, and his sympathy and judgment were all vital to Lytton.[2] The end of this period of the novelist's dramatic aspirations, and accordingly of his close involvement with Forster, was naturally reflected in the letters as a matter of course.

How much else is reflected in the change in the correspondence is a matter of conjecture. There is no open suggestion of any frustrated sense of redundancy on Forster's part, and no suggestion that Lytton, like Browning, Thackeray, and Dickens, could take only so much of Forster's often over-protective patronage. What is clear, is that for a few years after 1840 Lytton seems to have become far less reliant upon Forster, and seems to have begun to differ more emphatically, politically.

The Examiner, and Forster, were generally consistent in their view of the need for a more representative Parliament, and in their liberal view of the "People". Lytton, on the

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[1] The Duchess de la Valliere (1836), The Lady of Lyons (1838), Richelieu, or the Conspiracy (1839), The Sea Captain, or the Birthright (1839), and Money, a Comedy (1840). Macready featured in all first productions, and all were reviewed extensively and generously in the theatrical and literary sections of the Examiner.

[2] All this is made clear enough in the correspondence, in Macready's journal, and in Shattuck.

other hand, at first enthusiastically advocated liberal views about parliamentary reform, but later reversed many of his opinions as he drew nearer to the Tories. Accordingly, his view of the "People"— the key issue —changed too. In 1820, for example, as a Liberal, he could dedicate his volume of childhood poems to the "British Public . . . who have always been the fosterers of Industry, or Genius. . . ."[1] Again, in 1831 (a year after the publication of the anti-Tory Paul Clifford), in a parliamentary speech advocating the passage of the Reform Bill, he referred to the "intelligent people" of Britain, and commented that he could "scarcely consider him wise who holds even the affections of the populace in contempt. . . ."[2] But by 1842, he was predicting, in a letter to Forster, that "Zanoni will be no favourite with that largest of all asses — the English Public,"[3] and in 1843 he could refer to the "lazy quietude of vulgar taste" and the "singular and fantastic caprices of the popular opinion" which "betray both a public and a criticism utterly unschooled in the elementary principles of literary art. . . ."[4] He says this in a preface that plainly "holds the affections of the populace in contempt," and which declares, petulantly, that his book would

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[1]Edward Bulwer-Lytton, Ismael, an Oriental Tale, with Other Poems (1820).

[2]Edward Bulwer-Lytton, Speeches, 2 vols., ed. John Forster (1874), I, 6.

[3]28 February 1842. Quoted in The Life of . . . Lytton, II, 35.

[4]From the Dedicatory Epistle of The Last of the Barons, Novels, VIII, xxii-xxiv.

be the last time he would "trespass upon the Public."

But Lytton's aristocratic upbringing and Norman ancestry had always been in his writing for those-- like Thackeray -- who chose to see them. After all, in one of his first public utterances, at the debating society of Trinity College, Cambridge, he had argued for monarchy and aristocracy, during a debate on American and English institutions.[1] In his turn to Conservatism, he was thus only being true to the picture he drew of himself in the autobiographical fragment[2] and in Pelham (1828).

Just over two months after this review of Night and Morning, another-- by Forster --demonstrates that although their relationship might appear to be on a slightly different footing from what it had been, the Examiner was still prepared to support Lytton where he did not offend against Liberal political and moral sensibilities. The review is of the first publication of Lytton's collected dramatic works (1841). Forster writes approvingly of their "undiminished popularity," of the new introductory remarks (dealing with theatrical "situation"), "very justly felt, and happily expressed," and of The Duchess of Valliere (first performed 1837), which he singles out because it "contains some of the author's most effective writing, his purest versification, and finest discrimination of character."[3]

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[1]Thomas Cooper, F.S.A., Lord Lytton, a Biography (1873), pp. 25-26.

[2]Robert Lytton, The Life . . . of Edward Bulwer Lord Lytton, 2 vols. (1883), I, 2-174.

[3]Examiner (28 March 1841), p. 198.

Again, towards the end of 1841, the Times, the Morning Chronicle and the Examiner joined together in brief debate over the Times's allegation that Lytton's Newgate novels were responsible for the spread of "false moral principles" throughout the country.[1] The Morning Chronicle answered the obviously politically motivated attack, by drawing a parallel between Paul Clifford and Eugene Aram, and Othello and Macbeth, and by asserting that anyway, people "are in no real danger of being misled by tale or drama into deeds which bring their necks within peril of the halter." The article continues, charging the Tory party with itself being the "great demoralising agency of the time":

> The unprincipled arts employed by Toryism, and successfully employed as to the present result, during the last few years, have done more to nourish a canker in the national character than all the immoral fictions ever published. . . . Toryism has long been strengthening itself by substituting a struggle of party for one of policy and principle. Truthfulness in argument or profession it has laughed to scorn. Of religious pretensions it has made unscrupulous and abundant use. Its cajolery has experimented upon every class in society. It . . . staves off the demand of its responsibilities to a struggling population by illustrating the wisdom of delay from official frauds and accidental fires; and Sir E. L. Bulwer has exposed something of this sort of morality in his writings.[2]

Forster quotes all of this in his follow-up article in the Examiner two days later, approving, in the main, but demurring at the Chronicle's remarks about the limited influence of immoral literature. Now although he makes it clear that he is on Lytton's side, and not confusing him with the

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[1] Times (17 November 1841), p. 4. See below, pp.

[2] Morning Chronicle (18 November 1841), p. 2.

writers of actually offensive books, he is quite emphatic that novels are to be condemned if they are morally faulty. Certainly he makes it clear that he does not treat the matter as lightly as the author of the article in the Morning Chronicle:

> We think somewhat more gravely perhaps . . . of the danger of those books which are plainly directed to a false sympathy with crime. It seems to us, that to a person of cruel propensities, the descriptions of crime that are to be met with in books of that kind, must have the same sort of effect that an obscene book has on the libidinous. They are addressed to the appetite for cruelty. In their pages, cut-throats are held up to admiration for the qualities belonging to their throat-cutting, and to them only. Such productions have found no acceptance with this journal at any time. We have not stopped to consider if their sphere of mischief were large or limited: we thought them nuisances, offences against public decency, and did our best to put them down. When, on the other hand, we have commended the works of Sir Edward Bulwer, it has been for tendencies directly the reverse of these.[1]

The reviews in the Times and the Morning Chronicle, are political in tendency, but only because satire of the kind in Lytton's novels, and in much English fiction is political in tendency. Forster notices that the Times "betrays itself" in its remark about the "contrast . . . in point of morality" between Paul Clifford the "Captain of a band of Highwaymen . . . and the crowd of judges, bishops, and ministers of state," and which is favourable to the former. Evidently this was an enormity to the Times. "Exactly so." writes Forster:

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[1] Examiner (20 November 1841), pp. 738-9.

> It was the writer's intention to make it so. It was the aim of the book to show, that there was nothing essentially different between vulgar vice and fashionable vice; but that, in certain circumstances, the first might even have the advantage. The maxim of Fielding, that the follies of either rank in reality illustrate the other, has been acknowledged and worked upon thus, by every writer of real wit in the language. They have adorned "the low" . . . to pull down the false pretensions of the high. . . . What they thought vulgar, was <u>the thing</u>: not <u>the form</u> it might have happened to assume. What they thought immoral, was to see crime attended by every kind of misery and infamy in one part of society, and in the other waited on by all sorts of dignity and honour. And it is because Sir Edward Bulwer has asserted and found a place among these distinguished men, that he is now the subject of attack.

Forster was probably only too glad to take Lytton's part in this essentially political interchange, especially as it centred on a book which gave him the opportunity not only to reaffirm his opinion of the quality of Lytton's writing, but also to score politically against the Tories.

<u>Lucretia</u> (1846), Lytton's next Newgate novel was largely suggested to him by the criminal career of the Wainewrights.[1] The book received a predictably antagonistic notice from much of the Tory press. The chief criticisms once again centred on what was seen as its immoral tendency, together with an additional criticism that in his infatuation for the criminal subject, he had lost sight of his original objectives in the story.

Lytton complained of this treatment in a letter to

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[1]Thomas G. Wainewright (1794-1852; <u>DNB</u>); art critic, poisoner, and forger. His wife was also implicated in his crimes. He died, a convict in Tasmania.

Forster:[1] "The press, as far as I have seen it, sings one chorus of attack as if it was Jack Sheppard out-shepparded." He went on to express his "disgust" at "seeing the same old assaults," and continued: "I see it presumed that the object of Lucretia was that which I said I had in contemplation before the Wainewrights' lives were known to me, viz.:- some expositions of money and social impatience, whereas I expressly imply in my preface that I was diverted from that design by the lives of those two criminals, and that it was only incidentally and here and there that I could carry out some portions of that original conception." He went on to admit, however, that it was because of the "omission of certain passages in the original draft of the preface" that he had failed to make himself clear.

Forster's review[2] appears to have been written in response to the complaints voiced in the letter, for it has two main purposes: firstly, a clarification of Lytton's expressed objectives in writing his book, and secondly, an attempt to counter the charges of immoral purpose and effect.

In the review, Forster restates what Lytton had said in his preface, and emphasises the change in intention. He also asserts that Lytton had been attracted by the guilt of the originals of Lucretia and Varney, because it was not merely brutal, but cultured: "Thus it seemed to [Lytton] . . . to present the opportunity of exhibiting, in connexion with

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[1]December 1846; quoted in The Life of Edward Bulwer First Lord Lytton, II, 86-9.

[2]Examiner (5 December 1846), pp. 771-3.

those accidents of disposition or education which predispose to crime, that false and headlong tendency in society itself [the original theme of 'money and social impatience'] wherein the criminal finds his easiest means of safely eluding or baffling what society most affects to value and honour." Now, although Forster does not think that this "design" had "always been kept in view," he is clear that "there can be no doubt . . . that a purpose of the kind justifies the employment of such materials."

He continues his defence of the novel's objectives, by asserting that one of its aspects was to show that society was hypocritical, and-- perhaps more profoundly --that it was too used to think of goodness "a faculty of the pure intellect," too prone to "exaggerate the value of culture that is simply and singly mental." "Wherever crime is found that may not be traced to the uninstructed mind," he continues, still emphasising the book's high moral objectives,

> be sure that you will there find the heart uninstructed, and the affections unfurnished and untrained. . . . Where the mind and the heart possess nothing in common, the more we cultivate the first, the more we may deprave the last. There was nothing so remarkable in Feuerbach's collection of the crimes he had himself judged and sentenced in Bavaria,[1] than with all the absence of the more genial attributes of our nature, the predominance of intellect and will.

In answer to charges about the moral effect of the book, Forster comments that although it is a novel about crime, "the thrill" of which "does not leave us" to the last, yet,

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[1] Anselm R. Feuerbach, Narratives of Remarkable Criminal Trials, trans. Lady Duff Gordon (1846).

it does not confuse "Night's children," with "those of Day." He goes on: "It leaves us without morbid thoughts or unhealthy fancies . . . without the least desire to play ingenious tricks with our consciences, and more than ever convinced that men may not hope with impunity to overpass or refine away those broad and decisive lines which mark the eternal boundaries of vice and virtue." Forster adds with a degree of caution, or irony: "We do not know how others may read Lucretia, but we can honestly say it has left that impression upon us."

The remainder of the review is taken up largely with extracts from the novel itself. Yet, even here it is apparent that he is following his argument through, and quoting purposefully and with good judgment. His first extract is taken from the remarkable execution scene with which the book opens,[1] and although perhaps being a little too melodramatic for modern taste, is, as Forster says, "as bold a note to strike . . . as that of the first line in the daring tragedy of the Cenci: 'That matter of the murder is hush'd up!'" Forster shows how even this scene was part of the moral design of the novel, and, like the murder in the Cenci, was "hush'd up here also," till it found "vent in the sensual enjoyment and murderous villany" of Gabriel Varney. He further comments on Varney's character: "With minute fidelity, has the author of Lucretia depicted and shown this incarnate cowardice, cruelty, and wickedness, in the very midst of those social weaknesses and falsehoods by which alone it

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[1] Novels, XIV, 4-8 (part I, Prologue).

could have thriven or been for any length of time sustained." Another extract follows this, illustrating the weaknesses of Varney's character— obviously intended, in part, as a refutation of the charge that the novel's bad characters were treated with undue sympathy liable to inspire imitation.

Again, Forster, driving the point home, follows this with a similar analysis of Lucretia's character, its formation and effect, and again supports his comments with a series of extracts which leave no doubt about Lytton's intent, and which give support to his thesis as clarified by Forster.

Finally, again in answer to the criticism that the effect of the book is immoral, he quotes from the epilogue at the close of the last volume— an extract which poses the question, "Doth the chalice, unspilt on the ground, not return to the hand? Is the sudden pang of the hangman more fearful than the doom which they [Lucretia and Varney] breathe and bear? Look and judge!"[1] Forster then reminds Lytton's critics euphemistically (as anyone who has read the description of the fates of the two criminals will realise[2]) that "A mad house has received the one, and a convict-ship the other."

"We need not enter into more detail of the peculiar character and construction of this novel," he continues, and again repeats that "Its interest is extraordinary." He finds, though, that "the tale labours under one disadvantage. The actors in the first volume give place to a new generation

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[1] Novels, XV, 293 (part 2, Epilogue).

[2] Novels, XV, 293-9 (part 2, Epilogue).

of sufferers and actors in the second and third." Yet Forster points out that this has its advantage: "But as our old friends leave us, and Lucretia remains alone, a stronger and more fascinating interest gathers around her. In the tragic drama which follows, filled with young, pure, and innocent actors, she is the iron and relentless Fate."

Other extracts follow, which tend to emphasise the more positive aspects of the novel's morality, and which also round off Forster's whole carefully controlled defence of Lucretia.

On January 30, in a leader, Forster returned to discuss the pamphlet that Lytton had issued in reply to his critics.[1] Much of it is respectful tribute. In much, he lets Lytton argue his own defence of the tragic novel: "Has not the delineation of crime, in every age— been the more especial and chosen thesis of the greatest masters of art quoted to us as authorities and held up to us as models"[2] and, more emphatically: ". . . in all the classic tragic prose fictions preceding our own age, criminals have afforded the prominent characters, and crime the essential material."[3]

On the other hand, Forster reaffirms (as we have seen above) that there was not "an offence more obnoxious" to his taste and "opinions of morality" than an

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[1] Edward Bulwer-Lytton, "A Word to the Public" (1847). Reviewed in the Examiner (30 January 1847), pp. 66-7.

[2] Novels, XV, 314 ("A Word to the Public", appended to all editions of the novel after 1847).

[3] Ibid., pp. 321-2.

author who "gloated on crime, and held it up to admiration." Further (in support of Lytton), while conceding that he had once "thought" he "perceived a tendency to the fault in . . . Night and Morning," he insists that in Lucretia, "There is no admiration of the criminals; they are as hateful as their crimes. . . ." However, he observes here-- for the first time --that it "may be fairly objected" of Lucretia that "the subject is too monotonously criminal," and "is indeed for that reason a painful book." This was a criticism that Lytton had touched on himself in his pamphlet, where he had allowed that if "in its treatment" he had "overstepped the true limits of terror, that may be an error in art, but not one . . . in moral tendency and design."[1]

Both of Forster's considerations of Lucretia are generous, despite his criticism that the subject was "monotonously criminal," and his doubt whether Lytton had always kept its "design . . . in view"-- a rather ambiguous comment, not necessarily implying a moral lapse. In fact, the reviews reveal, once again, his partiality for Lytton's writing, for he refers only in passing to the "monotonously criminal" tone which caused the book to be "painful," and we have already seen the extent to which he disapproved of this aspect of the Newgate novel, in others' works-- an "error in art" comparable in kind to Thackeray's "radical defect", for which, we remember, his works were duly damned.

However, this critical generosity can be seen as partly justified: Lytton's novels seen in even the worst light are

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[1] Novels, XV, 348.

not characteristically pessimistic, morbid, or cynical, as it can be argued from the humanist or liberal point of view, that Thackeray's more often are. Nor are they as abandoned as G. W. M. Reynolds's or Ainsworth's could be. Further, Lucretia itself, is not the universally damning, fundamentalist, portrayal of society that Vanity Fair or The Book of Snobs presents. Both of these latter works, and Reynolds's Mysteries of London, and Wagner: The Wehr-Wolf, were appearing in installments during 1847, and no doubt Forster, himself, made the comparison, and proportioned his criticism accordingly.

There is also little doubt that Forster sincerely considered Lucretia to be another example of Lytton's genius, and there is even some justification for his taking such a view, then. Yet, had this novel been published between 1841 and 1846, even though it could not have been politically objectionable to Forster, it is debatable whether it would have been so stoutly defended or praised. But it so happens that by 1846, the personal relationship between Lytton and Forster was much improved.

Once again, with a return to his theatrical aspirations, Lytton had found Forster indispensable. A series of letters between them, written between December, 1845, and April, 1847, show that Forster was acting as his agent and adviser as of old, though with less success.[1]

Forster too needed Lytton's help. He wrote to him (27 October 1847) announcing his coming appointment as the

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[1]Shattuck, pp. 228-34.

general editor of the Examiner, and expressed the hope that Lytton would provide some copy "from week to week, however brief. . . ." He also mentioned his intention, "with the help of friends," to purchase the entire Examiner property. In fact, from now on despite political differences, the friendship continued, with only minor, or short-lived lapses, until Lytton's death in 1873.

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In summary, then, Forster's criticism of Lytton's Newgate fiction was generally sensible. He recognised that Lytton's objectives and artistry were of a different order from that of the run-of-the-mill Newgate novels. Yet, in some respects especially on the moral issue he showed himself to be partial to Lytton's writing. This bias was partly a disinclination to admit that a great writer (as he considered Lytton) could be an immoral one, and partly simply because Lytton was his friend, and of his party. It is also clear, once again, that like most other critics of his generation, Forster was very politically inclined and that his liberal sentiments occasionally tended to be one with his more purely critical views. This is shown nowhere so clear as in his whole-hearted approval of Paul Clifford; possibly, in his general disapproval of Night and Morning, and is underlined, as we shall now see, in his reviewing of Lytton's historical novels.

## IV

Quite apart from political considerations, or personal friendships, Forster's reviews of Lytton's historical novels are often critically marred, or are undistinguished as reviews of fiction, primarily because of his tendency to concentrate on their more purely historical aspects. This is perhaps predictable in view of his own historical bent [best illustrated by his own publications (see bibliography)].

Lytton completed five major historical romances during the time that Forster was reviewing for the Examiner, but the reviews of them in the Examiner are really only interesting because they high-light a number of Forster's shortcomings as a critic as perhaps better than anywhere else. Thus these reviews reveal him, as a critic of fiction at his most ineffective, notwithstanding some sound -- if commonplace --criticism.

Taking first the novels that were less conscientiously based on historical facts, the first of these to be reviewed by Forster was The Last Days of Pompeii (1834)-- a novel immensely popular when it first came out,[1] and which for one reason or another has continued to enjoy a surprisingly wide readership down to the present. James C. Simmons attributes a major reason for its immediate success to the fact that its publication "coincided with the most destructive eruption of Vesuvius in modern centuries."[2] In fact, as he points out,

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[1] Sadleir, p. 366.

[2] James C. Simmons, "Bulwer and Vesuvius: the Topicality of The Last Days of Pompeii", Nineteenth Century Fiction, XXIV (June 1969), 103-5.

news of the disaster reached England, conveniently for Lytton, just one week before his book made its appearance in the book shops. Now, without disputing that such a singularity, widely covered by the press, must have helped the initial sales, and that further eruptions from time to time also helped, I would suggest that an additional topicality was even closer to home.

The few years immediately prior to the publication of the novel were years of tremendous social upheaval. Another French Revolution, with all its implications for the British working-class, had occurred in 1830; the Swing rick-burnings, from 1830 to 1833; the Bristol Riot, in 1831; the Reform Law disturbances in general, from 1830 onwards; and to cap it all, the Poor Law riots, in 1834. To Lytton and his contemporaries, England itself must have seemed on the brink of a disastrous social eruption.

The last days of Pompeii, portrayed by Lytton, with its decadent rich, and its materialistic, corrupt priesthood, overshadowed by Vesuvius threatening retribution with its resulting terror and anarchy, can be seen as a reflection of contemporary England. In fact, in his <u>England and the English</u> (1833), Lytton also paints an irresponsible and corrupt aristocracy, in its turn corrupting the ecclesiastical, judicial, educational, and political systems. Over all, looms the possibility of revolution and anarchy:

> I look beyond the day; I see an immense expenditure, an impoverished middle class, an ignorant population, a huge debt, the very magnitude of which tempts to dishonesty; I behold a succession of hasty experiments and legislative quackeries . . . till having run through all the nostrums

> which Ignorance can administer to the impatience of Disease, we shall come to that dread operation, of which no man can anticipate the result![1]

A closer look at the novel reveals more echoes of England and the English; yet, a more detailed study needs to be made, to see whether the theme is developed, and to what degree. A brief consideration already suggests that England's contemporary political and social unrest as portrayed in England and the English, will be seen as having had a major influence in shaping the novel, as well as adding to its popularity.

However, there is disappointingly no suggestion of anything of this in Forster's review.[2] For, even though he confirms Lytton's view of the universality of human dispositions, his emphasis on this is on what he considers to be the authenticity of the historical reconstruction rather than on any more specific topicality: "Secure in this noble sense of the immortality of the affections, Mr Bulwer, by simply moulding upon them the manners of the past, the great influences of the scene and time, has accomplished the object he proposed. The passions of eighteen centuries ago come from him with the life and freshness of to-day."

We might expect Forster to take this moral view of history, and perhaps as far as fiction goes, such a view is valid. After all it is the view that Scott and Dickens assumed for their historical novels -- not to mention Shakes-

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[1] Edward Bulwer-Lytton, England and the English, Knebworth edn. (1876), p. 353. (Book V, chapter 8).

[2] Examiner (26 October 1834), pp. 676-7.

peare in his histories. But Forster, as an historian, and Lytton, as a novelist, claim the book as a truthful reconstruction of Pompeian society. Of course, their view is naïve; we know today that human psychology and social behaviour are constantly varying, and that we cannot necessarily argue past, or alien emotive values or behaviour patterns from present or native ones.

Therefore, although we might partially agree with Forster as to the conscientiousness of the novel's construction, and its dramatic quality, it is more difficult to agree with what he has to say about its "startling air of reality":

> "The Last Days of Pompeii," we take, indeed, to be one of his finest works. . . . it has a singleness of purpose, and a sustainment, unequalled in any of his previous writings. . . . It is, in its essence, a drama. . . . In its construction as a work of art, in its general keeping, its trouble and its repose, it is the most masterly production that we have read for years. . . . Rembrandt never flung light and shade into one great effect with a pencil more true and fatal.
>
> When we use the term art, we mean, of course, that which in its highest form realizes nature. For the natural . . . is the great charm of the book. It opens with a startling air of reality.

Part of the reason why it does not, in fact, open or continue convincingly, is because it is not easy for us today to accept Forster's (and Lytton's) assumptions about the "immortality of the affections." Thus, the world of the novel is not convincing as history, and as fiction, it seems too contrived. Even so, Forster approves:

> This is a striking part of the reality of the novel. In every person and thing that he describes he is chiefly anxious, as far as he may, to recover only what has been. He would build

> no new city. He rebuilds the ruined streets that once formed Pompeii, while from the colours furnished by his own heart he would paint the very passions that once dwelt within them. He would create, if possible no new actors for the reawakened scene-- he would call only to a second existence the bones he sees around, the remains of those who once filled its houses with sorrow or with joy.

Yet as history or fiction, the opening of the novel, that Forster found so real, is nothing more than a travelogue or film-set view of Pompeii-- complete with Roman baths, chariots, togas, a generous sprinkling of pagan expletives, and so forth. Against this unreal background strut a number of costumed Englishmen, strangely out of place, but trying hard to belong.

Forster does not view it in this way, however, and he enthuses about the portrayal of the characterisations based on fact:

> In Glaucus he has brought to life the owner of . . . the House of the Tragic poet. . . . And the graceful Athenian Glaucus, the Aedile Pausa, the purse-proud Diomed, the high-born and heartless Clodius, the "immortal" Fluvius, the exquisite Lepidus and the kindly epicurean Sallust, play over again here a portion of the game of life together with as true a zest as when they first played it. . . .

The more purely fictional creations are also approved of. Nydia, the blind slave, Forster took to be "perfect in itself, and in the truth it forces out of all around it." He also describes the brief sketch of a prostitute as "one of the most striking . . . of fiction." He continues: "A few careless strokes of the pen seem to have given birth to her, yet that shrill voice will never leave us!" Only in Arbaces, the high priest, does he express dissatisfaction:

"Arbaces we like the least. He is often artificial, and verges not unfrequently on the common-place." But unwilling to strike a sour note for long in this review, Forster claims, that "He has a certain severe and majestic earnestness, however, and he is used throughout the story of the loves of Glaucus and Ione with equisite art. He is to them a closer and more human shadowing forth of the undefinable terrors of Vesuvius. He stands, too, in striking contrast beside the stern simplicity of the Nazarine Olinthus."

The review closes with a promise (unfulfilled) to return to a fuller consideration of the Amphitheatre scenes-- "perhaps the noblest scenes in the book" --and of the characterisations of Nydia and the gladiators. He concludes with extracts from the book, selected to exploit the sensational aspects of the book, in much the same way as a modern film trailer does.

Forster's almost unqualified approval of the book can be seen as puffery. But equally, it can be seen as a genuine enthusiasm for an historical reconstruction, which at least exhibits imagination, appreciable artistry, and above all-- as far as the general reading public were concerned --a compelling plot with all the popular ingredients, including topicality.

Leila (1838), Lytton's next historical novel based loosely on fact, is the story of its heroine's conversion to Christianity. This is complicated by her sense of duty to her Jewish father, the villain of the story, and her love for the Moslem hero, Musa. Her trials are set against the background of the Seige of Granada in the late fifteenth century.

Predictably, Forster does not seem particularly interested about the dominant element of romance in the story. His chief interest is once again with the historical aspects as his choice of extracts shows. Yet even so, he is unable to summon up a great deal of enthusiasm:

> A stirring tale . . . filled with startling effects and strange transitions-- containing few evidences of the higher genius of its versatile and accomplished author-- but an admirable tale not withstanding, in which variety of impassioned incident, great warmth of picturesque feeling, and a series of sudden and strong dramatic movements, sustain a lively interest from the opening to the close. It is a fault, if we may call it so, incident to the subject, that everything throughout is too much in a state of fermentation and effervescence-- and that the author's display of a certain order of power is too ostentatious and indiscriminate.[1]

Leila is nothing but Nydia (of the Last Days of Pompeii) over again, and Almamen, her father is a restatement of Arbaces. These two character types occur repeatedly in Lytton's fiction, but are rarely convincing. Forster himself fails to be convinced by Almamen. He writes: "We do not like Almamen the Jew, who is a repetition of the Enchanter of the Last Days of Pompeii, but good use is made of him in several passages of the story to show the debased condition of the Jewish race in general, even in those days of their wealth and numbers."

The tale was a disappointment to both Lytton and Forster. In his preface to later editions of the novel Lytton admits that "in delineation of character and elaboration of plot," Leila was "inferior" to his other historical romances. Yet

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[1] Examiner (20 May 1838), p. 308.

even so, in this notice, Forster, the historian and friend, grasping at straws, approves of Lytton's sketchy portrayal of Tomas de Torquemada, the first Grand Inquisitor of Spain. He considers it the "finest . . . in the story-- conceived and sketched in Mr. Bulwer's higher style." As a fictional character, however, it clearly does not achieve realisation, and it seems that a lukewarm Forster, finding not even historical merit in the story as a whole, was simply doing the best he could for Lytton in this review.

Following Leila, in the same volume, is another story set in fifteenth century Spain. Calderon the Courtier (1838), is the story of a Machiavellian politician and courtier, who is forced to a series of moral judgments when he realises that he is assisting in the seduction of his own daughter. Accordingly, he is obliged to oppose-- with success --the sexual desires of his patron, Prince Philip. Thus he falls from favour into the hands of his enemies. The story ends tragically for both father and daughter.

Forster could not have approved of the liberties Lytton had taken with history, nor could he have condoned the attempt to make a hero of the ruthless opportunist Calderon. However, being, above all, willing to please, he seems to be avoiding any lengthened criticism, and dismisses the tale as one "of higher pretensions, but brief, and too hastily wrought out."[1] There is, in fact, little he could have written in support of the story. Its only possible merit is in the entertaining plot, which is much in the tradition of G. P. R. James's more

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[1] Examiner (20 May 1838), p. 309.

sensational historical novels.

He reacts with a great deal more enthusiasm, though, for the three novels that Lytton had based more closely on historical fact. Yet here again, in some ways disappointingly, it is mainly the historian in him that approves.[1] He calls Rienzi (1835), the first of them, in "some essential respects . . . Mr. Bulwer's greatest novel." This is a catch-phrase, repeated with each new work, but not necessarily saying much; yet, Rienzi is possibly his most ambitious and successful novel at this date. Even so, he goes on to admire the novel's "general keeping, its dramatic power, its singleness of purpose and sustainment," and refers to its "profound knowledge, variety, vivacity, and effect," and to the "exquisite skill and exactness" of some of the character sketches.

As in the Last Days of Pompeii, Forster considers it a merit that the "truths of history are never in the course of the fiction in the slightest degree departed from," and that "the minutest detail . . . is never violated." Further, he finds, as he also expressed in his review of Pompeii, that historical fact is brought to a greater truthfulness when endowed with human passions. Thus in preferring Lytton's interpretation of Rienzi's character to Gibbon's, Forster boldly declares that he accepts "the Fiction hereafter as the Truth."

Forster repeats his criticism of Leila, but attempts to turn it to Lytton's credit— the kind of partisan reviewing

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[1] Examiner (13 December 1835), pp. 788-9.

that must have annoyed Thackeray so much:

> Too much intellect, we think, is scattered among the characters generally. It is an honour which a writer may be proud of, to share even a fault with Shakespeare. And this is Shakespeare's grand improbability. It issued from the abundance of his genius. The thought and feeling are too often in his plays presented together.

He also refers to the "want of intellectual modesty" in the author's intruding "himself occasionally where he is not wanted." Then after citing just two instances, Forster, in apparently two minds, contradicts what he had just written and claims that the "instances are manifold."

Forster's insistence in this review that we should "not see the intervention of the artist," but should "feel the very highest power of the art. . ." as the passions "work themselves. . . ." in "a constant state of projection," seems almost to predate Henry James, and to support the view that the early Victorian writers and critics were rather more conscious of the techniques of fiction than is generally recognised. But without denying that this was also true of Forster, it must be admitted that his insistence on dramatisation in the novel is just as likely to be due to his own theatrical orientation. In fact, it can be seen that, like Dickens and Lytton, his own total view of the novel, was very much affected by his own active involvement in the world of the theatre.[1] Thus, in the absence of any other critical language for fiction in those early days, it seems only natural that he should review Rienzi (itself noticeably theatrically orientated) very much in terms of the stage. He

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[1] See above, pp. 177-8.

refers, for example, to the "solemn march of tragical events" leading up to the "catastrophe," to the "course of the action," to the "various actors and . . . scenes," and, perhaps most convincingly, he compares the novel with the plays of Shakespeare.

Forster reaffirmed, in essence, what he had said of the book when he reviewed it again, briefly, as volume one of a collected edition of Lytton's works. "We have read the romance a second time with an increased sense of the writer's genius," he writes, and continues: "It combines, in a story of striking interest, exquisite poetic beauty and depth of reflection, with a decided and philosophic purpose. It embodies some of the most instructive lessons of human passion and character, in the illustration of a noble and useful moral."[1]

His review of Lytton's The Last of the Barons (1843),[2] once again suggests that he is a generous but unperceptive critic of Lytton's historical fiction. Yet, in fairness to him, he was only evaluating these later novels in terms of Lytton's own intentions which the novelist was to explain in his preface to Harold:

> There are two ways of employing the materials of History in the service of Romance: the one consists in lending to ideal personages, and to an imaginary fable, the additional interest to be derived from historical groupings; the other in extracting the main interest of romantic narrative from History itself. . . .
> For the main materials of the three Historical

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[1] Examiner (8 March 1840), p. 150.

[2] Ibid. (11 March 1843), pp. 148-9.

> Romances I have composed [*Rienzi*, *The last of the Barons* and *Harold*], I consulted the original authorities of the time with a care as scrupulous, as if intending to write, not a fiction, but a history. . . .
>
> I shut myself out from the wider scope [of historical romance] . . . and denied myself the licence to choose or select materials, alter dates, vary causes and effects. . . .[1]

In effect, Lytton's intention had been to write a history enlivened and illustrated with fiction-- a new medium as he thought.

Forster, the historian, approved, as might be expected, and found this story of the Earl of Warwick, to be a "great subject, and treated worthily." Going on to approve of the delineation of Warwick himself, Forster asserted that he did "not discover a weak or faltering line," further, that in it, "all is massive, compact, and firm . . . in his presence the most turbulent scenes have dignity and repose. . . . Not a scene of the book passes over which this figure casts not some shadow of its nobleness." There is much more in the same vein of extravagant enthusiasm about Lytton's portrayals of other historical characters in the novel.

But with his historian's priorities, Forster considered the novel mainly as history in this review, and expressed his intention to comment "on the characters of pure invention," and the novel's "construction with reference to them . . . on a future occasion." This occasion unaccountably did not occur until three months later, when he responded, as we shall see, with an enthusiasm only slightly abated.

Yet, as just mentioned, he took offence with several

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[1] *Novels*, X, v-vii.

minor points in the book, and with some of the views expressed by Lytton-- views which, on the face of it, hardly seem to merit the extremity of his disapproval. In fact, several circumstances seem to point to a quarrel between the two friends-- most likely, as we have suggested, prompted by growing political differences.[1]

In the first place, he criticises the "singular bad taste of the author's prefactory disquisitions on the nature and principles of art." This is a reference to the lengthy "Dedicatory Epistle", which was dedicated to Lytton's "indulgent Critic and long-tried Friend," to whose suggestion "the work owes its origin."

Now, if this were in fact Forster himself to whom the novel was dedicated, it is unlikely that he fully appreciated the compliment since he would have been considerably embarrassed by the declaration in the last paragraph, that the dedicatee's "exquisite taste as a critic," was "only impaired by that far rarer quality-- the disposition to <u>over</u>-estimate the person you <u>profess</u> to esteem!" This was a compliment that, apart from the unintentional but public slur to his critical integrity, Forster (if he were indeed the dedicatee) must have been aware could be expected to create a great deal of hilarity in what would be seen by some as its naïve truthfulness. In fairness, however, while this is true of him occasionally, there is no real reason to suppose that his enthusiasm for Lytton's writings was in general anything but sincere, and he must have been rightly annoyed by Lytton's

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[1] See above, pp. 77-8.

lack of tact.

The remarks in the "Dedicatory Epistle" that came under Forster's critical censure, then, were assumedly those that tend to sneer at the idea of an intelligent and appreciative reading public. Lytton writes, in essence, that the "intellectual writer will probably never be the most popular for the moment," since literature is not judged by "the true rules of art," but "from a thousand prejudices and ignorant predilections." "Hence," he asserts, "the singular and fantastic caprices of the popular opinion. . . ." He goes on to complain-- rather ungratefully of a public and a criticism that had on the whole patronised him very well -- that the "violent fluctuations" of opinion about literary works, "betray both a public and a criticism utterly unschooled in the elementary principles of literary art. . . ." A further comment about the "lazy quietude of vulgar taste," must also have offended against Forster's liberal sentiments.

Once again, Forster feels obliged to "interpose objection" to another "ill-considered remark." Lytton claims in the course of his novel, that it was the "popular hatred and the rise of the House of Tudor," that exaggerated the deformities of Richard the Third. Further, he asserts that the "unexamining ignorance of modern days, and that fiery tragedy, least worthy of Shakspeare, and therefore most popular with the vulgar," have fixed the character "into established caricature."[1]

Forster, writing as a liberal, responds with ill-concealed

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[1] Novels, VIII, 236-7(book II, chapter 6). Revised in later editions.

disgust. "The sneer in this sentence may be passed," he comments, dismissing it as being beneath his contempt. He continues with an exposure of Lytton's "double error, of judgment and of fact," and writes: "That the tragedy in question is not the one least worthy of our national poet, may, we think, be as safely affirmed, as that it never was popular with the vulgar, and never will be." He goes on to prove the latter point with references to stage records of the play, and concludes-- setting the word "vulgar" in its liberal context --that Lytton's "remark will apply to the trash of Colley Cibber, but not to the tragedy of Shakspeare." He is unable to resist firing a parting shot -- on this issue --by denying that "in this splendid romance, there is one touch which the poet had not already made immortal, either in the tragedy which bears Richard's name or the trilogy of Henry the Sixth."

Yet again, Forster objects to Lytton's reference to "our 'niggard and ignoble civilisation,'"[1] and questions his seriousness in comparing it unfavourably with "the warriors of the 'Norman Conquest' as the diminutive trees to the mighty oaks." "On the whole," he concludes generously, but not convincingly, "we may suspect this to be simply rhetorical." However, Forster focuses on his objection, when he asserts that "whenever the author comes among his characters-- and he jostles them much too often --we have a great deal of contempt expressed or implied for the sources and givers of popularity, and the qualities which are

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[1] Untraced, probably expunged in later editions.

supposed to ensure it. . . . it seems misplaced in a book whose hero was the idol of a populace." There is more on the same issue, but which only goes to demonstrate further the extent of Forster's annoyance with Lytton's illiberal views.

When he again reviewed the book, this time less from the historical point of view, some three months later, his tone was altogether different.[1] Allowing for his objections of the previous review, he added:

> . . . we find on a closer view of the work no reason to modify or change; what we then admired we think even more admirable. All deductions made, we take the book to be one of the most masterly products of a writer who has . . . steadily cultivated only his highest powers. The Last of the Barons, when all objections have been summed against it, will remain a great and admirable romance: a subject of the best order in English history treated worthily."

From an historical point of view, no doubt much of Forster's enthusiasm is justified. Lytton has indeed handled his factual material well, and the book is still very readable on the whole. Further, with Rienzi, there can be little doubt that this is, as Forster claims, one of Lytton's "most masterly products." Yet the fictional characters are rarely if ever convincing, and they and their activities actually seem often quite superfluous to the scheme of the book. Of course this might be expected in a work that attempts to reflect history so closely.

In fact, it is interesting to see how Forster appears to be giving a blanket approval to their delineation; yet,

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[1] Examiner (10 June 1843), pp. 356-7.

on a closer view, it is clear that his opinions are considerably qualified. For example, although Lytton (in his preface) considered his conception of Adam Warner, the philosopher and fictitious inventor of a crude sort of steam engine, to be "an ideal portrait," the most "original in conception, and the most finished in execution" of any to be found in his writings, "Zanoni alone excepted," Forster fails to respond with anything like the same enthusiasm. He allows the character a degree of prominence in the review, simply by opening it with a retelling of his story, yet after all, Forster merely praises the "strains of wise and tender sweetness in the language of this childlike philosopher. . . ." Again of the delineations of Marmaduke Nevile and Nicholas Alwyn, two other fictitional characters, Forster writes that he found them "masterly conceptions both." Yet it turns out that all he meant by this was that he approved of the way they complemented the more factual parts of the novel.

Harold, the Last of the Saxon Kings (1848), is the third and last of Lytton's novels to rely heavily on historical fact at the expense of the fictional aspects. Forster, once more, does not hesitate to approve of this approach, and his review of the novel[1] again reveals his historical bias: "We never laid down a book more reluctantly," he writes. "The fiction has but created a healthy appetite for fact, the relish to ascertain and understand yet more." He also responds warmly to Lytton's intimation that provided Harold were a success, he hoped to complete a series of novels

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[1] Examiner (17 June 1848), pp. 388-90.

"genuinely illustrating our earlier history." Forster asserts that the "successful achievement" of such a series based on "the noble models already given . . . would not only ensure a large stock of rational enjoyment to romance-loving readers, but would tend largely to promote the cultivation of that most manly and healthy of all possible studies, the understanding of the history of our native country."

Most of the review is taken up with historical comment by Forster (generally in agreement with Lytton), and with relatively long extracts from the book-- "not the most interesting, but those we can most easily detach from their context."

The real interest for us, however, lies in the way that the review reveals how much Lytton's subject matter and point of view in the book may have been influenced by Forster's unfavourable reaction to some of Lytton's views in The Last of the Barons.

Firstly, Lytton's attempt to give a fairly detailed account of the historical and social background of the action presupposes at least a degree of confidence in the existence of an intelligent and sympathetic reading public. Further, he tells us himself, in the preface, that he thought this approach to the story, although "making larger demands on the attention of the reader, seemed the more complimentary to his judgment."

The extent of this new-found confidence in the reading

public, however, seems to be a little shakey. For, in his preface, he appears to be only half in jest when he advises Charles D'Eyncourt that he must be prepared to take his "due share of blame," for encouraging him to "hazard the attempt" in respect of the more factual approach.[1] Yet this is still in contrast with his previous complaints about the "lazy quietude of vulgar taste," that offended Forster so.

Obviously there are several main reasons for this partial change of heart, apart from a desire to redeem himself in Forster's eyes-- who after all was very useful to him. Primarily it was supposedly Charles D'Eyncourt who encouraged him to take this more optimistic view of his potential readers. Then again, it is probable that improved personal circumstances enabled him to take a more generous view of the public in general.

We might suspect, also, that Forster's annoyance with Lytton's view of the Saxon race as a "niggard and ignoble civilisation," had some influence in the shaping of Harold. For the book is a justification of the race, and purports to show "what life and strength remained beneath the apparent stupour of the Saxons at the landing of William."[2] Indeed much of Forster's historical comments harp on this purpose, and he is obviously well pleased with Lytton's more considered and liberal change of opinion.

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[1] Novels, X, xvi.

[2] Examiner (17 June 1848), p.388.

Yet in spite of his pleasure, there were obvious weaknesses in the book which Forster could not easily ignore, even though he does his best to play them down. For example, he felt obliged to admit that "at first" the book struck him to be "over-learned," and that there was a "minuteness of disquisition on some points of race and manners," which savoured of "pedantry." However, Forster attempts to soften his criticism (an old one), by claiming that "this impression wears away," and that long before the end of the first volume, "what you objected to is found to have been essential to the development of the writer's plan, and greatly to simplify the march and action of the narrative." His rationalising on Lytton's behalf, however well intentioned, still does not prevent the first volume, at least, from being a rather tedious one, and the charge of pedantry sticks.

Forster also objects-- almost apologetically --to the delineation of Hilda, the prophetess, mainly because her "prophecies . . . have a result too real," and he finds them a "jar" to the "philosophical and true," so predominant in the book. He thought it would have been better if this supernatural element could have "resolved itself into such merely superstitious foreboding as history might warrant and philosophy explain." This view also helps to account for his objections to Arbaces in The Last Days of Pompeii, and to Almamen in Leila. From Forster's point of view, such portrayals offended against both historical and religious truths, as well as against the rules of the classic theatre, where the action must work itself, without unjustified assistance

from the supernatural or unexpected.

He attempts to excuse Lytton again, in this objection, by arguing that if he had unconsciously measured the book "by too severe a test," it was that which Lytton's own genius had suggested. He adds further, that "Hilda, all objections made, remains a very striking and poetical creation." As before, despite this attempt to gloss over his criticism, the objection still stands.

V

Not all of the remaining miscellaneous notices and mentions of Bulwer-Lytton and his works were by Forster. Several of the earliest ones particularly, may have been by Fonblanque, who also greatly admired Lytton, while the notice of My Novel(1853), was almost certainly written by Henry Morley.[1] Nevertheless, those that we can be reasonably certain to have been written by Forster, only confirm the picture that we already have of his opinions of Lytton's fiction in general.

Ernest Maltravers(1837), and its sequel, Alice(1838) are both praised lavishly by Forster for the "eminently easy and steady" handling that helps to distinquish them as products "of the greatest powers of authorship."[2] Zanoni (1842), he finds an "eloquent and thoughtful book"

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[1] Examiner(26 February 1853), pp. 132-4. See below (pp.203-7) for arguments of identification which can be equally applied to this notice.

[2] Ibid. (24 September 1837),pp.612-5, and (25 March 1838),pp.179-80.

but which has the "defect" of having a "limited and wrong" view of the French Revolution—[1] a reminder that there were some basic differences of opinion between Forster and Lytton at this time. Finally, Forster's review of The Caxtons (1849),[2] seems to sum up much that he held desireable in Lytton's (or any) fiction, and stands in a direct contrast with anything he was prepared to say about Thackeray's major works of fiction during these years. He admires the novel's "tone of confirmed manliness, and mellowed charity and repose" its "kindlier wisdom," and the "heart of love which beats and glows underneath." He admires also its concern with everyday things in which "the most brilliant colours are elecited from the most homely surfaces without outrage to the truth of nature." Finally, he admires the "comprehensive and healthy" moral of the story. For, he concludes: "The impression left by the book, and by the truths it inculcates, is at once sober and elevating."

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On the one hand, as I have said, Forster shows himself in his reviews of the fiction of Bulwer-Lytton, to be less than objective. For, while it is true that he did find a fault with the moral treatment of a part of Night and Morning, there are other occasions, notably(as we have seen) in the case of Paul Clifford, where he made no such objections at all, even though according to his usual

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[1] Examiner (26 February 1842),pp. 132-3.

[2] Ibid.(20 October 1849),pp.659-61.

view of Newgate fiction, it was at fault.

Further, even though he treated Lytton's major historical novels in their own terms (as histories enhanced with fiction), and even though in some ways they do have genuine merit, they are certainly not the great works of genius that Forster claims them to be. Quite apart from the fact that historical fiction was enjoying a sort of vogue, he was simply being carried away by his own enthusiasm for history,[1] and by his partiality for his friend and all he stood for.

On the other hand, these reviews of Lytton's fiction do confirm amongst other things, that Forster had some strongly held critical views. They make it clear, for example, that he thought that a work of fiction should reflect real life in a positive manner; in fact, that it should be responsible and beneficial in a humanitarian and social (almost religious) sense.

These notices also confirm that he held these opinions so strongly that he was prepared to condemn illiberal attitudes in a work of fiction, whether they were those of Thackeray or even Lytton.

Finally, both these notices and those of the social novel in the next chapter, make clear that it was not the subject that ever really bothered Forster, but only the manner of its treatment: whether it be unartistic, unreal, immoral, or obtrusively didactic.

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[1] Possibly an over-simplification, since it could be argued that Forster's <u>real</u> interest in history was with the history of democracy itself, and that this is also the real subject of Lytton's historical novels.

# CHAPTER 4

## FORSTER AND THE SOCIAL NOVEL: MARTINEAU, CARLETON, DISRAELI, AND KINGSLEY

### I

There is a sense in which most novels can be seen as social novels in the way that they comment in one way or another on society. For example, although we may not normally think of Oliver Twist and Jane Eyre, or Vanity Fair and The Way We Live Now as social novels in the commonly accepted sense, the first two can be seen as commentaries upon the nature and harshness of some Victorian institutions, and the latter two can be seen as exposures of the corruption among the Victorian upper-classes. But any attempt at a rigid classification is likely to result in anomalies and in critical distortion. Therefore, for the purpose of this study, the social novel will be defined in broad terms as embracing what are sometimes called sociological, politico-economic, tractarian, and industrial novels, and so forth.[1] Yet, although this chapter excludes specific discussion of such novels as Oliver Twist, or Vanity Fair, much of what is said below will, of course, reflect equally on them.

Because the social novel comments on contemporary society, it can perhaps be seen as having two aspects which, particularly, invite critical attention. One of these is that of the relationship between fiction and reality, and

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[1] It is worth drawing attention here to Raymond Williams's paper on the social novel, in which he distinguishes seven basic categories of the novel of ideas in an attempt to make sense of the complexity of "the immense variety of relations between novels and ideas": "Dickens and Social Ideas," Dickens 1970, ed. Michael Slater (1970), pp. 77-98.

the other is that of the question of how far fiction should have a moral tendency, and whether the author should be obviously didactic.

These are two aspects of fiction about which Forster had decided opinions-- particularly about the latter. Now, if we can see what his usual point of view about them was, we can expect to begin to see a critical pattern of some kind behind his otherwise unplanned weekly reviewing, which simply had to deal with such novels as they came up.

Naturally enough, the social novel is often dominated by concern with a social injustice, or with a moral flaw in society. In the typical social novel of this period (1833-55), such concern tends to be obtrusive, and other elements may be left to play a secondary role. Again, another characteristic is that the story is often partly set against a working-class, or economically depressed background, and in such cases a conscientious attempt is made to give the story credibility and urgency by the use of documented facts. If the term "realism" can ever be used without undue misgiving, it is here, because such works were necessarily directed towards influencing opinion about the world as it existed outside fiction.

As we shall see, Forster recognised that the social novel has a tendency to several weaknesses that often marr it as fiction; yet the realistic presentation of common life, and the strong moral purpose were precisely the characteristics that he consistently selected for praise where he could find them-- all things being equal.

Forster's review of Rivalry (1840), a novel by Henry

Milton, reveals better than most the sort of realistic treatment that he looked for in fiction. It also helps to show why he constantly used The Vicar of Wakefield (1766) as a critical touchstone; why he later found the opening of Bulwer-Lytton's Night and Morning (1841) so pleasing,[1] and why he preferred the early Dickens to the late.[2]

The main plot of Rivalry centres on the rivalry between two middle-aged ladies (one a spinster, and the other a widow) for the hand of a retired lawyer, who Forster describes as "sensible and steady, not at all romantic, verging on fifty, and a bachelor." Neither of the ladies are successful, despite their determination, for at the close he is carried off in triumph by a quiet and unassuming Scots woman.

Forster opens his review with a general approval of the book. He declares himself "glad to give a hearty welcome" to this "new and pleasant novel of ordinary life," in which "good observation is clothed in an easy and agreeable style, and an accurate eye for the ludicrous combined with a rare and generous inclination to the good-natured."

Moving on to a consideration of the novel's construction, he also expresses approval of the "natural and inartificial progress of the story," which, he feels, might have been better constructed, but which is treated in a "delightfully easy and unconstrained" manner:

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[1]See above.

[2]See below.

> A pleasing interest survives to the last, though the plot unwinds itself by gradual degrees through the whole of the third volume; not a single shock or surprise having been kept in reserve; not a burglary, a ghost, a secret marriage, or a murder, having been called in aid. We have an abduction, it is true, and a duel, and a forged will, with all the sundry interests thereto appertaining; but everything is known about them as they proceed; the confidence on the writer's part, early established with the reader, knows no after-diminution.[1]

It may seem strange that Forster should praise a novel for being relatively uneventful and straightforward. But at the time this was probably salutary. When readers were still turning to works of the silver-fork school, retaining tastes affected by Gothic novels, and tending to admire weak imitations of Scott, it was sensible to recall them to the virtues of fiction which did not allow mere indulgence in fantasy. It is as well to remember here, that Forster, the admirer of the good social novel, also differed pointedly with Bulwer-Lytton by insisting on the importance of Jane Austen.[2] It was Forster, too, who evidently first introduced Dickens to Jane Austen's fiction.[3]

The other quality that Forster was always evaluating in any novel was its moral purpose. Certainly, as we have said elsewhere,[4] because morality was necessarily so much a part of the Victorian novel, Forster's comments are usually relevant to any critical argument about the work as a whole. Further, it would hardly be true to say that he characteristically paid an <u>undue</u> attention to questions about the

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[1] <u>Examiner</u> (31 May 1840), pp. 339-40.

[2] See above.

[3] <u>Life</u>, II, 4, 96.

[4] See above.

morality of a book. Such an impression might arise from Forster's having been so prominent in the disputes arising in connection with Dickens, Lytton, and the Newgate novel. But, in fact, Forster rightly declared himself "not strait-laced as to the moralities of fiction"[1] -- and the severity or indulgence of his reviewing did depend a great deal on the merit of the work itself.

So, Forster was nearly always concerned both with realism and with moral purpose, yet he was also very aware that it was precisely the realistic social novel that was apt to be marred by didactism. He expresses this view clearly on many occasions, and perhaps his most lucid and representative statement is found in his notice of Mark Wilton (1848):[2]

> With much grace and vigour of conception, and with great sweetness of imaginative sentiment, this little work fails to produce in the reader that tranquil or elevated mood of mind which is the result of a true work of art. This is owing to the attempt to make it at once an imaginative presentation and a didactic essay. The fictitious narrative and the moral essay cannot be run into one; they are incompatible. The incidents have no effect by being kept in subordination to an opinion which is to be impressed; and the people will not understand the moral to be proved by them because their imaginary character is continually obtruding itself. Poor Sambo's advice, "when you preachee preachee and when you flogee flogee," may be parodied for the use of didactic novelists. The story and the moral had better be served up on different plates, as somebody recommended with reference to the butter and hairs in it at a slovenly inn. Imaginative literature can only promote moral culture indirectly by the tastes and habitual temper which converse with it encourages. The felicity, however, with which many of the characters in this book are drawn and supported justifies the belief that the author, if he would confine himself to legitimate novel writing, and keep his moral precepts for his sermons, would be eminently successful in the portraiture of domestic life.[3]

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[1] Examiner (8 September 1855), p. 565.

[2] Charles B. Taylor, Mark Wilton: the Merchant's Clerk (1848). Whether this review was in fact by Forster, or another, the general views expressed in it are those that Forster normally held, as the rest of this chapter illustrates.

[3] Examiner (12 February 1848), p. 101.

By this time he is evidently quite clear that good fiction and good morality have no necessary connection. Yet his Liberalism occasionally seems to have got the better of him, and he can be seen on those few occasions to be championing the didactic novel as a powerful medium for the dissemination of Liberal propaganda. Referring to Lady Morgan's novel, The Wild Irish Girl (1806; New Edn. 1846), a book dealing with the Irish question, he writes:

> We have here the first of a long and brilliant series of services rendered to Ireland through the attractive instrumentality of romance. It is hard to calculate the precise amount of moral and political effect assignable to this magic agency, but we suspect that it is generally more under-rated than orators, journalists, and pamphleteers would willingly admit; nor have we a doubt that in a fair distribution of the praise due to talents and exertions of all kinds, for the vast changes (and every change was necessarily an improvement) which have been wrought in the political state of Ireland since this novel was first published, a large share would accrue to its earnest and "fearless" author.[1]

In those instances, therefore, in which Forster seems to have a double standard on this critical question, it is also clear that two points are involved. One is that when he appears biased, it was often because fiction might deal with causes which the Examiner (or Forster himself) particularly supported. Then, there is the second point, that while the obviously didactic novel, weighed down with authorial intervention, was objectionable, he was clearly prepared to welcome any which put their case more dramatically through the narrative, situation,and characters. This is the

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[1] Examiner (8 August 1846), pp. 500-1.

critical principle Forster invokes in reviewing Uncle Tom's Cabin (1852), which he found "altogether worthy of praise on every account." For, he continues, deeply as Mrs. Stowe was "impressed with her didactic purpose, her righteous desire to gain the public ear has withheld her from assuming in any page of her volume the unattractive form of pure discussion." He goes on to regard it "purely as a novel," as "a work of the very highest literary merit."[1]

Forster was not the only critic to over-estimate Uncle Tom's Cabin, but when we consider that the didactism is dramatised, that the Examiner had long been anti-slavery, and that the times were in any case ripe for such a book, we can perhaps account for his indiscretion about the book as a work of art.

Finally, although, as we have said, Forster's personal and political allegiances often dictated his expressed opinion of the teachings of the social novels he reviewed, we must emphasise again that he was usually realistic about their artistic pretensions.

Now, the application of his critical principles with respect to the social novel, and the way that the quality of his reviewing differed from others reviewing in the same journal, are both well exemplified in the Examiner's generally friendly reviews of Harriet Martineau's politico-economic tales, and in William Carleton's Irish problem tales, as well as in the less friendly reviews of the novels, not only

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[1] Examiner (4 September 1852), pp. 563-6.

of Disraeli, but also of Charles Kingsley.

## II

Forster and Harriet Martineau appear to have had much in common: both were Unitarians; both were from a mercantile background; both were thorough working Liberal journalists;[1] and they both had close friends in common, such as those in the group surrounding Macready.

In fact, it is likely that their acquaintance started shortly after Miss Martineau had first met Macready in June 1834--[2] about a year after Forster had first been introduced to the actor.[3] Now, although there are few references to their relationship, it appears that it was at least meaningful enough to cause her to grieve over Forster's death in 1876, and for her to write: "He and Browning and I were about the only ones left of the group which used to enjoy meeting at Macready's, and I feel his loss more than I could have supposed I should now feel any on that line of my life."[4]

Between January, 1833 and April, 1834, there were seven mentions of her works in the Examiner.[5] However, we can be

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[1]It is an interesting thought that, all things considered, Miss Martineau may well have been one of those asked to contribute articles to the Examiner when Forster became its general editor in 1848.

[2]W. C. Macready, The Diaries of William Charles Macready, ed. William Toynbee, 2 vols. (1912), I, 153.

[3]Ibid., I, 36.

[4]From a letter written in 1876; quoted in Vera Wheatley's The Life and Work of Harriet Martineau (1957), p. 388.

[5]See the Bibliography for a complete list of her fiction reviewed in the Examiner from 1833 to 1855.

reasonably certain (on stylistic grounds) that they were by Fonblanque, rather than by Forster, and so their chief interest to us here, is that they underline the decided improvement in reviewing standards that occurred in the journal when Forster became more directly responsible for the literary reviewing.

The "Literary Examiner" during 1833 and 1834 was a very brief affair, consisting usually of only one or two columns-- sometimes much less. It normally seems to have been written by Fonblanque himself, although Forster, the theatrical reviewer, contributed to it frequently.

Now, Fonblanque's approach to criticism was decidedly political, and his reviews are also often distinguished, like his political leaders on the front page, by their caustic irony and wit. Further, he often seems to have used the columns of the literary section simply to help to fill out the journal with lengthy politically-loaded extracts from the book being noticed. This last seems to have been true of the first four of these seven notices of the works of Miss Martineau, while the other three notices seem to have been introduced only as an excuse for actual political commentary by Fonblanque.

We can be reasonably certain, however, after these notices (on the grounds of style and content), that the remaining five notices of Miss Martineau's works were written by Forster.

He is more openly critical of her didactism than Fonblanque, who only once, in passing, expresses any

uneasiness.[1] But Forster's notices still tend to be brief at this period, and her works still receive only a cursory consideration as literature, although it is noticeable, on the other hand, that there is not nearly so much political comment as in the case of Fonblanque's reviewing. Yet the fact that there is some such comment, and the fact that even in later years, Forster often could not resist expressing a clear political bias in his reviewing, reflects back on the apprenticeship he served under such Radical editors as Leigh Hunt and Fonblanque.[2] However, it must be reaffirmed that except in special circumstances, unlike Fonblanque, his main concern, even when reviewing works of fiction as slight as those of Miss Martineau's, increasingly tended to be with the art of fiction itself.

This concern is reflected in the first of these five notices by Forster: "The Scholars of Arneside" (1834),[3] is, as he explains, "an illustration of the injurious effects of the tax on information."[4] Now, although he finds some "passages of remarkable force-- detached pictures of great excellence," he also finds fault with the "didactic part" of the story, in which "There is some exaggeration which might well have been spared."

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[1] Examiner (27 October 1833), pp. 677-8.

[2] See above.

[3] Harriet Martineau, "The Scholars of Arneside," Illustrations of Taxation, 4 vols. (1834).

[4] Examiner (31 August 1834), pp. 549-50.

His dissatisfaction with didactic fiction "even when as good as Miss Martineau's,"[1] is echoed in his review of her novel, The Hour and the Man (1840):

> . . . Miss Martineau has undertaken to solve some favourite problems of social and political philosophy . . . various subjects of grave speculation and inquiry are brought into earnest discussion in the work before us, with an eloquent sincerity of purpose that all sincere people must admire. We are disposed to regret the form in which they are given to the world. The idea of sitting down to a novel, while it predisposes the reader to more excitement and interest than the book is likely to respond to, will fail to induce that sober and reflective temper which would do greater justice to its thoughtful beauty and wise suggestiveness.[2]

He goes, in this review, on to point out that her novel as fiction "is defective", because "the characters are in no instance thoroughly interwoven with the texture of the fable," and that the negro characters "talk too much like poets, and philosophers, to awaken at all times unforced sympathy." But, although this is a more sustained critical effort than is apparent in previous reviews of her works in the Examiner, the notice seems to have been hurriedly written, and anyway is marred because Forster largely overlooks the topical intention of the book, and views it almost solely as an historical novel.

Therefore, although he recognises that the portrayal of Toussaint, the slave hero, in the book, is rightly a "master-

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[1] Examiner (12 April 1840), p. 229.

[2] Examiner (6 December 1840), pp. 774-5.

piece," he also expresses a disappointment that he is not treated with a greater and a more faithful historical fulness. For he complains that the "sympathy awakened" for Toussaint, "is less for his action on the events and circumstances of the scene, than for his revelation of the secrets of his own heart." Now, the truth is that while Forster may have a point as far as the actual form of the novel is concerned, what he complains about-- the way the character is treated as "a psychological inquiry"-- is, in fact, the very strength of a book, which in his own words, even today, "with all its faults and weaknesses of construction will reward a right perusal."

Harriet Martineau's "The Crofton Boys" (1841), is a brief tale included in her series, The Playfellow. Its theme is in the tradition of "self help" and was bound to please the Liberal in Forster, because, as he says in his notice of the tale, "Watchfulness and hopefulness, are in the writer's mind always; she does not despair of the worst . . ."[1] Typically, he also approves of the naturalness of the narrative, in which "the avoidance of exaggeration in every point, is quite extraordinary . . ."

He returns to this last point in his brief notice of the first volume of her Forest and Game Law Tales (1845)-- a volume of didactic stories set against an historical background. He again emphasises her realistic presentation of ordinary life, and admires the "fresh and natural pictures of scenery and custom," as well as the unobtrusiveness of

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[1] Examiner (15 January 1842), pp. 37-8.

the treatment.[1]

Finally, the three tales in the second volume of the Forest and Game Law Tales were noticed by Forster the following month. Although the brief notice seems favourable, it ends with a complaint that their "didactic passages sometimes ill assort with the movement and action."[2]

The Examiner did not notice the third volume of the Tales, published later that year. In fact, there are other notable omissions, difficult to account for, which include her three volume novel, Deerbrook (1839), a short tale Dawn Island (1845), and other miscellaneous tales and pamphlets.

Now, although these reviews of Miss Martineau's works are not now individually important, and although the five that Forster probably wrote are obviously too few and too brief for us to draw many conclusions from them about his critical attitude towards didactic fiction, they do at least help to high-light the improvement in reviewing standards after he became the chief literary critic of the Examiner in 1834. For, while it is true that Miss Martineau's tales were often little more than political tracts, and were fairly treated as such by Fonblanque in his notices, Forster unlike Fonblanque asked something more of Miss Martineau than just political agreement. Therefore he was careful in all his reviews, to praise her fiction where he could-- encouraging her where she was strong, but nearly always criticising her mere didactism.

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[1] Examiner (6 December 1845), pp. 772-3.

[2] Examiner (17 January 1846), pp. 772-3.

III

On turning to the Irish writings of William Carleton,[1] we come to a different aspect of Forster's reviewing. In fact, in the light of his normal view of the social novel, the four notices of Carleton's tales are hard to account for, and it is tempting to conclude that Forster did not write them at all. For, they are almost exclusively concerned with the political aspect of these Irish reform tales, and what little literary criticism there is, is on the whole, unrealistically generous. However, because of internal evidence we may be fairly certain that he wrote the first three notices that appeared in the Examiner, although we may be less certain about the last one.[2]

No doubt the policy of the Examiner itself, was a major reason for such a pronounced political concern in notices of tales which were, after all, themselves chiefly concerned with expressing a political point of view. During the early 1840's especially, the journal was highly critical of the way that the Westminster Tories were handling the steadily worsening state of affairs in Catholic Ireland.[3] The

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[1]William Carleton (1794-1869; DNB), Irish novelist; studied to become a Catholic priest, but later rejected Catholicism in favour of Protestantism, and a life of Literature. There is no record of any communication with Forster, although Valentine M'Clutchy (1845) was published by Chapman and Hall, and it is most likely that Forster was at least consulted, in his capacity of reader.

[2]See the Bibliography for a complete list of his fiction reviewed in the Examiner from 1833 to 1855.

[3]The Irish situation then, is well summarised in J.H. Treble, "The Irish Agitation," Popular Movements c. 1830-1850, ed. J. T. Ward (1970), 152-79.

Examiner clearly welcomed a writer such as William Carleton, whose tales of peasant life, it hoped, might encourage English readers to "think . . . of the many substantial grievances for which Ireland cries out . . . for redress."[1]

However, another reason for Forster's stance in these reviews could be more personal. A lot of Ireland's social and economic problems were supposed to have been caused and perpetuated by the establishment and ruthless domination of a minority Church-- one with powerful Westminster backing. Now, Forster himself was a staunch nonconformist, and apparently a "Cromwellian with reference to religious liberty,"[2] and could, no doubt, echo the Liberal criticism of the Church domination with a certain amount of conviction: "It will be long before social wrong and oppression count among things past in Ireland." He writes, "The country in which a great Church Establishment continues to be held by force, as men hold a military post or a robber's fastness, is not the place where one can look for a reign of justice."[3]

Apart from his own political and religious sympathies, it is appropriate here to mention Forster's own lifelong interest in Ireland, which is well manifest in his many Irish friendships,[4] in his biographies of Goldsmith and

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[1] Examiner (18 January 1845), pp. 35-6.

[2] Fitzgerald, p. 54.

[3] Examiner (18 January 1845), p. 102. A view also repeated by Forster in his notices of the Irish Sketch Book and St. Patrick's Eve, Examiner (13 May 1843), p. 292; and ( 5 April 1845), p.212.

[4] For example: Maclise, Emerson Tennant, Whiteside, Macready, Quain, and Mulready.

Swift,[1] and in the considerable amount of Irish material in his library.[2] It was this abiding interest in Ireland and in Irish affairs that enabled him to recognise, probably correctly, that "Mr Carleton is the best of all the delineators of Irish character," and that "No man has understood the peasantry of Ireland so well . . . and from none has it received such thorough justice. . . ."[3]

As far as other aspects of Carleton's works are concerned, it is probable that they will continue to have a limited value to social-historians for their presumably accurate description of contemporary peasant life in Ireland, but as fiction, although often superficially entertaining, his portrayals of humble life fall short of Forster's generous claim that they merit a position with Crabbe's and Scott's.[4]

## IV

If these notices of William Carleton's fiction are relatively unhelpful, no less are the notices in the Examiner of the fictional writings of Benjamin Disraeli.[5] For, although there are seven mentions of his works in the journal between 1832 and 1855, it is not yet possible to ascribe more than one of them with any degree of probability to Forster,

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[1] See Bibliography.

[2] See, for example, Forster Collection: A Catalogue of the Printed Books (1888), pp. 241-54. See also Forster Collection: A Catalogue of the Paintings, Manuscripts, Autograph Letters, Pamphlets, etc. (1893), pp. 160-3.

[3] Examiner (3 September 1842), p. 565.

[4] Ibid.

[5] See the Bibliography ( to be added ) for a complete list of his fiction reviewed in the Examiner from 1833 to 1855.

without further external evidence. The internal evidence in five of the notices, in fact, seems to point, once again, more to Fonblanque's authorship than to Forster's, while the review of Sybil could equally have been written by Fonblanque, Forster, or-- as we have suggested below-- by Thackeray.[1]

Yet they deserve some slight attention here, if only for the sake of completeness, and because, like Fonblanque's notices of the works of Miss Martineau, they show how uncritical, reviewing in the same journal could be, when undertaken by Fonblanque (or others).

Disraeli had been one of the group of Radical journalists, and authors that used to meet at Lady Blessington's. By 1834 the group had also included, amongst others, Fonblanque, Bulwer, and the young Forster,[2] who had probably been introduced to Lady Blessington by Fonblanque. Both Forster and Fonblanque must have known Disraeli well enough, then; but whatever the condition of their relationship with him, it almost certainly worsened when Disraeli turned to the Tories in 1835.[3]

The first notice, written before Forster was responsible for reviewing fiction in the Examiner, sets the tone of Disraeli's treatment by the journal. On stylistic grounds, it was probably written by Fonblanque, and hardly points towards a friendly relationship between the two! Alroy (1833)

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[1] See Appendix A.

[2] Michael Sadleir, Blessington-D'Orsay: a Masquerade (1933), pp. 261-2.

[3] Renton claims that "Forster positively hated" Disraeli, (p. 237), but he gives no evidence for saying this, and in any case he must be referring to a much later period.

is an historical novel set in the East, and depicts the rise and fall of a Jewish warrior-hero. Fonblanque admits to only having dipped into the book, and seems understandably to have been put off by the many references to Hebrew theology and tradition scattered throughout the book. He writes cynically: "Mr. D'Israeli writes riddles . . . The meaning of this book, we are assured is very mystical-- we only know that the type is very large."[1] There is a further attempt in the review, to ridicule the book by a derisive comparison of one short passage with one from Don Quixote. But there is no overt literary or political criticism.

This is followed, the next year, by a notice almost certainly by Forster. Unfortunately, Disraeli's share of attention in this review of Heath's Book of Beauty (1834) consists of only two sentences. Forster praises his contribution to the annual,[2] finding it "full of the most charming beauty and pathos," and "as sweet as a thing by Boccaccio might be."[3]

Henrietta Temple (1837) and Venetia (1837), were ignored, while the remaining reviews of Coningsby (1844), Sybil (1844), and Tancred (1847), were predictably unfriendly in their rejection of Young England. Even the few lines of literary comment seem to echo the political disapproval almost entirely dominating these reviews: Coningsby is "cleverly written throughout. Even its dullness has a vivacity to it, its

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[1] Examiner (12 May 1833), p. 293.

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[3] Examiner (16 November 1834), p. 723.

impotence a sort of energy."[1] Sybil has "many passages of delicate and beautiful writing," but only (so the reviewer seems to suggest) where it is disposed to "take part with the weak and trample on the strong," or where with a "masculine sense and liberal spirit . . . it denounces many social evils."[2] Finally, the second and third volumes of Tancred would have been "welcomed . . . as extremely pleasant, curious, and lively pictures of certain phases of life in the East," but for "the lofty and ludicrous pretentions" of the rest of the novel."[3]

A detailed consideration of these three reviews probably belongs more in a future biography of Albany Fonblanque, who had the ability, the inclination, and the inducement in the shape of an expected appointment from the Whigs, to write such attacks on Young England.[4] Yet, no matter who wrote these reviews-- and the Examiner was almost bound to respond in this way-- their chief interest and concern is political, and thus again they offer a contrast with the more serious critical attention that Forster usually gave to even a social novel.

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[1] Examiner (18 May 1844), p. 307.

[2] Ibid. (17 May 1845), pp. 308-9.

[3] Ibid. (20 March 1847), p. 179.

[4] Fonblanque was appointed a statistical officer in the Board of Trade at the end of 1847.

V

During the thirties and early forties the Examiner might have been prepared to give such a novel as Kingsley's Alton Locke (1850) a more sympathetic consideration than it did. But by 1850, the Examiner was as nearly the true voice of the Whigs as it had ever been. Fonblanque had already been rewarded for his journalistic services to the Whigs, by a civil appointment, and Forster was also looking for an appointment from the government.[1] Further, the events that had led up to the Chartist Petition of 1848, and the greater distrust of radicalism of any kind that had followed, were echoed in the literary columns of the journal, as well as on the front page. It was perhaps inevitable, therefore, that Alton Locke, with its Chartist hero, should be politically censured by a more pro-Establishment Examiner.

The fairly lengthy review (four columns) of the novel is essentially in two parts. The first, dealing with the work as fiction, is probably by Forster, while the second part, dealing with the didactic messages of the book, seems to be by a different hand altogether. In fact, the review is interesting for three reasons: firstly, because it shows how reviewing in the Examiner was sometimes shared; secondly, because Forster's criticisms in the first part typify his attitude towards realism and didactism in fiction, and thirdly, it is interesting because it seems to illustrate a close Carlylean influence in its second part.

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[1]Fitzgerald, p. 19-20.

Forster's chief criticism, in the first part, which he repeats several times from different view points, is the obvious one, that Kingsley was not portraying ordinary life in a realistic way. He was often writing outside the range of his artistic imagination, simply because, in Forster's words, he had undertaken "to speak the sentiments and thoughts of the working classes, and in their own language and manner, with a very scanty knowledge of them, and this principally picked up second-hand. . . ."[1] To become "intimately acquainted" with the working classes, Forster continues-- perhaps thinking ideally of Dickens's childhood experiences revealed to him in 1847-- "men must sleep in the same dwellings, eat at the same board, follow the same pursuits, indulge in the same relaxations; and that for a considerable length of time. It is only all unconsciously, through such mechanical rubbing and continual contact, that men come thoroughly to know each other." Mr. Kingsley's "notions of the working-classes and their abodes," Forster concludes, "are mainly taken at second-hand from the evidence taken by Parliamentary Committees and Royal Commissions," and "sometimes at third-hand from authors who (like Mr D'Israeli in his Sybil) have already drawn largely upon these sources."

The second complaint Forster makes of the book is that it "is one of these attempts to combine polemics with art and fancy which can only end in producing an extremely equivocal result." He continues, underlining this:

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[1] Examiner (24 August 1850), pp. 542-3.

> If you will argue, argue; if you will give vent to imaginative conceptions, do so. But the creatures and figments of imagination are not facts from which to reason, and attempts at proselytism under pretence of simply amusing are generally as unfair as they are unwise. It may be questioned whether society has not outgrown the age at which the Esopian apolgue could be usefully addressed to it; but be that as it may, were Esop now alive, his good sense would teach him that a fable in two mortal volumes was a thing very monstrous, and not to be endured.

Forster raises these objections to the book "as a work of art," allegedly not "with any view to disparage or undervalue" it, for he finds it "in some respects a very original book" with "high merits." He admires Kingsley's qualities as a poet, his "genius for graphic delineation," his "masterly vein of imaginative musing," his frequently "singular felicities of diction," and his "strong dash of genuine humour." Yet, despite these qualities, Forster questions Kingsley's "power over the dramatic form to which he labours with such evident zeal and earnestness to make these high qualities available":

> He can sketch a character neatly and vigorously, but the assumption fails in working. It wants vitality. His <u>dramatis personae</u> are vividly placed before us so long as he leaves them in repose: but the moment he sets them to speak and act, we see them plainly moved by impulses from without, and not from within. He puts many admirable sayings into their mouths, all of which would be more natural, more pleasing, and more effective, had he been contented to utter them in his own person.[1]

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[1]For a more detailed examination of this passage, see above.

In general, this first part of the review typifies in several ways, Forster's reviewing at its characteristic best: his criticisms here are sensible and well-proportioned: they are, on the whole, good-naturedly proferred, and-- above all-- they are constructive. It is the sort of reviewing that helps to explain why his opinions seemed to matter to both author and prospective reader.

Yet despite his fairly close critical attention, and despite the merits of the book, which he correctly singles out, it is, as he concludes, more as a "controversial work" that the book "invites attention." Accordingly, the second half of the review deals with this aspect of the novel; but, curiously enough, as I have said, it seems to have been written by somebody else. In fact, it would appear-- because of its style and content-- that much, or all, of this half of the review, may have been inspired by Carlyle, indirectly, or even directly.

In either case it would be hardly surprising. The reviewer could easily have been drawn into a Carlylean way of thinking and expression, by a recent reading of Carlyle's newly-published Latter-Day Pamphlets (published monthly from January to July, 1850), coupled with the fact that Kingsley was himself plainly influenced by Carlyle-- enough to make him, by implication, a central figure in his novel.[1] It must have seemed natural, therefore, since both works were also published almost conjointly, and that both were much

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[1] See below.

discussed, to evaluate such a novel in terms of the Latter-Day Pamphlets.

Yet, there is another possibility. Kingsley had approached Carlyle in his search for a publisher for the novel. Carlyle, in turn, had arranged for the book to be considered by Chapman and Hall,[1] and no doubt he had seen at least parts of the manuscript before making such a recommendation to the publishers, for he writes (to Kingsley) with some confidence: " I have written to Chapman, and you shall have his answer on Sunday. . . . But without answer, I believe I may already assure you of a respectful welcome, and the new novel of a careful and hopeful examination from the man of books. . . ."[2]

Now, in his capacity as literary adviser for Chapman and Hall (1836-60), and as a close friend of Carlyle,[3] it is almost inevitable that Forster would have been consulted about the novel before it was approved for publication, especially since Parker's, the publishers of Yeast (1848), had already declined it, on account of its controversial nature.[4]

In view of this, it is possible that about the time of the publication of the book, there may have been considerable discussion by Carlyle, Forster, and possibly Chapman, and it may be that the last two paragraphs of this review, especially, are a rephrasing, or a direct quotation from such a letter or conversation. This would have been particularly

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[1] Charles Kingsley: His Letters and Memories of His Life, ed. Fanny E. Kingsley (1899), p. 92.

[2] Ibid.

[3] See particularly: W. Forbes Gray, "Carlyle and John Forster: an Unpublished Correspondence," The Quarterly Review, Vol. 268 (April, 1937), 271-287.

[4] Ibid.

politic, in view of Forster's close friendship with the novel's sponsor, Carlyle.

The gist of this second half of the review, is a general disapproval with Kingsley's Christian Socialist panacea for the ills of society. "The thing is impossible," the reviewer asserts, "The project will never advance beyond the region of Platonic ideas, shivering on the verge of creation, never to pass into substantial realities." But he ends, also in a characteristic Carlylean manner: "We are not at all in despair about our Christian Socialists. Pretty and well-meaning innocents! it is even pleasing to watch them, amid their infant mummery of the actions of grown men, unconsciously training themselves at that child's play to grapple with the honest realities of the business of the world."

Finally, Carlyle's letter to Kingsley (31 October 1850), written to thank him for a copy of the book sent at the time of publication, contains nothing that contradicts any opinions expressed in the second part of the review. The letter is tactfully worded, and is frank yet positive:

> Apart from your treatment of my own poor self [Saunders Mackay - a character in the novel] (on which subject let me not venture to speak at all), I found plenty to like and be grateful for in the book: abundance, nay exuberance of generous zeal; headlong impetuosity of determination towards the manful side on all manner of questions . . . everywhere a certain wild intensity which holds the reader fast as by a spell . . . At the same time, I am bound to say, the book is definable as <u>crude</u>; by no manner of means the best we expect of you-- if you will resolutely temper your fire. . . .
>
> Of the grand social and moral questions we will say nothing whatever at present: any time within the next two centuries, it is like there will be enough to say about them! On the whole,

> you will have to persist; like a cannon-ball that is shot, you will have to go to your mark, whatever that be.[1]

Perhaps the most interesting thing about the letter, when compared with the review in the Examiner, is the way that Carlyle carefully avoids, for all time, giving Kingsley any specific judgement on the teachings of the novel. For, like the reviewer in the Examiner, but without expressing the irony there, he seems more pleased with Kingsley's stance than with his specific philosophy.

Yeast (1851), and Westward Ho! (1855) were also reviewed in the Examiner, and received a similarly serious consideration from Forster-- their probable reviewer. He criticises both novels for their didacticism: Yeast, chiefly because its subject matter includes a "mixture of Chartist ravings and fifth-monarchy fanaticisms,"[2] and Westward Ho!, because of its dogmatism and its irrelevance in an historical setting.[3] Yet, it is important to note, that Forster's impatience with Kingsley's views, and with his way of obtruding them in the novel, does not prevent his seeing real merit in both novels: The "charm" of Yeast, to him was its poetic and "vivid descriptive power," while the strength of Westward Ho!, he recognises, is its narrative, abounding "in scenes and adventures of the most romantic character." For there "is everywhere the true relish of

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[1] Ibid., pp. 93-4.

[2] Examiner (22 March 1851), p. 180.

[3] Ibid. (2 June 1855), p. 341.

enterprise, there are plots, Jesuits, and inquisitions; there is love, and there is war, in far western islands, and in tropic woods of a world then half new and half unknown; there are sea-fights, storms, and shipwrecks; there are exquisite domestic scenes."

Lastly, The Heroes (1855) was also briefly noticed in the Examiner as a "delightful book . . . with all the simplicity that charms the young, and yet with no little of the colour and richness that belongs to his great power of picturesque narration."[1] This reference to the quality of Kingsley's artistic imagination underlines once again what Forster, despite his persistent disapproval of his didactism, had always rightly claimed as the strength of Kingsley's fiction. Indeed, if his fiction is at all readable today, it is almost solely owing to this quality, and to the ability of the reader to skim over many pages of unassimilated, and now, often irrelevant didacticism.

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[1] Ibid. (29 December 1855), p. 821.

# CHAPTER 5

## FORSTER AND MRS. GASKELL

### I

Forster was quick to recognise the merits of Mrs. Gaskell's first novel, Mary Barton (1848). The manuscript had been sent to Chapman and Hall by William Howitt, and Forster, as literary adviser and reader, had recommended publication. The copyright was accordingly bought for one hundred pounds,[1] and after a considerable delay, the novel was published in October, 1848.

It is difficult to understand why there should have been such a long delay (almost two years) over the publication of the novel, which, if we can accept what Mrs. Gaskell says, had been submitted to the publishers early in 1847.[2] The novel seems to have been held back, after it had been set up in type in the spring of 1848, apparently, because it turned out to be too short even for a two volume novel, instead of the three volume novel she had originally meant to write.[3] Then, of course, the publishers may have preferred to wait until after the politically disturbed spring of 1848. But one of the additional reasons for its slowness to appear, may well have been that Forster himself

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[1] A. B. Hopkins, Elizabeth Gaskell: her Life and Work (1952), pp. 69-70.

[2] According to Mrs. Gaskell, revisions were called for in the spring of 1848, at a time when the publishers had already had the manuscript "above 14 months." The Letters of Mrs. Gaskell, eds. J. A. V. Chapple and Arthur Pollard (Manchester, 1966), p. 75.

[3] Ibid. See also the original rough sketch for the novel reprinted in the appendix to Edgar Wright's Mrs. Gaskell: the Basis for Reassessment (1965), pp. 265-7.

had misgivings about the central role played by John Barton, the Chartist and murderer.[1] But, it is really impossible, now, to decide who it was who persuaded Mrs. Gaskell to make some revisions and decided on delay; certainly she herself is rather an unreliable witness to the transactions.[2]

However it was, when he reviewed the novel in the Examiner, Forster made no mention of the distortion that resulted from her change in the centre of interest.[3] His only complaints rather vaguely hint at the author's "occasional use of somewhat commonplace materials of effect," and her "handling of questions now and then beyond her reach." The first criticism is no doubt a reference to some of the more sensational aspects of the plot— for example, the mill fire episode in chapter five, and the chase after the "John Cropper", in chapters twenty-seven and twenty-eight. The second criticism must refer to her naïvete in dealing with the socio-economic matters in the novel.

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[1]See above, pp. 52-65, for Forster's views about crime in fiction.

[2]Why it is suggested that she is "unreliable", is because she told Miss Lamont (5 January 1849; Letters of Mrs. Gaskell, p. 70) that "John Barton was the original name" of the book, "as being the central figure to my mind . . . and it was a London thought coming through the publisher that it must be called Mary Barton." But her original plan for the novel (Edgar Wright, pp. 265-7) tends to confirm Raymond William's suggestion in his Culture and Society, 1780-1950 (1966), p. 101-2, that Mrs. Gaskell herself recoiled from a sympathy with John Barton long before publisher or Reader (Forster) had anything to say. The Letters do not altogether bear out what she had to say about the title; they do suggest very strongly, on the other hand, that the revisions called for were simply to make the book long enough to fill two volumes.

I am grateful to Professor K. J. Fielding for suggesting the possibility of this point of view.

[3]Examiner (4 November 1848), pp. 708-9.

The remainder of the review is all complimentary, but by no means puffery. His comments are evidently the result of a sensible and sympathetic reading. "This is a story of unusual beauty and merit," he writes, "It has a plain and powerful interest, a good and kind purpose, and a style which derives its charm from the writer's evident sincerity." Enlarging on her "power of a rare and unquestionable kind," he writes:

> Her power is with the sympathies, and if she carefully cultivates this she need not fear to have many competitors. She has a very right and keen perception of the motives which actuate ordinary life, as well as a knowledge of the higher and more out-of-the-way regions of existence which is not vouchsafed to every "distressed novel-wright." Above all she seems to write according to her knowledge, fairly and without misgiving: her characters talk naturally, and in their native garb of speech; nor is she ashamed to let the homliest truth have its own utterance.

Forster also suggests that in some ways Mary Barton is only marginally a social novel: "We should convey a wrong impression if the reader supposed the book to be a political novel. It is not that. The internal passions and emotions are its materials of interest; that 'dread strife' which the poet truly tells us to be equal, whether the shepherd's frock or the regal purple cover the heart that is agitated by it."

Finally, at the risk of seeming to see Dickens everywhere, his extracts from the novel, which follow the critical comments in this review, do seem particularly

Dickensian,[1] but without greatly enlarging on this, it should hardly surprise us. There is frequently a striking similarity between Mrs. Gaskell's writing and Dickens's; their subject matter, and their objectives were also similar, and the audience that they wrote for was essentially the same. Indeed, Dickens himself was to think her fiction compatible enough for his own journal, Household Words. Forster's choice of extracts was not, in other words, entirely due to the fact that he was readily tuned in to a Dickensian style of writing.

Mrs. Gaskell read Forster's review, and seemed generally pleased with it. In a letter to Edward Chapman (7 December 1848) she asked: "Who writes the literary reviews in the Examiner? I hoped Mr Forster, because I was so much delighted with Oliver Goldsmith's life, and (long ago,) with the Lives of the Statesmen &c; but people say he no longer writes the literary articles."[2] The latter comment was only partly true. As the editor in chief from the close of 1847, he obviously relegated part of his duties in the "Literary Examiner" where he was able, but the bulk of the responsibility for reviewing remained with him. In fact, on the grounds of style and content, there seems to be little reason to doubt that Forster, himself, wrote all of the reviews

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[1]For example: Chapter II. The description of Barton's living-room ("Mrs Barton produced the key" to "let alone Jane and the twins"), and Chapter IX: the reception of Jennings and Barton in the workman's cottage ("th' longest lane will have a turning" to "But I shall know her in heaven.")

[2]Letters of Mrs. Gaskell, p. 65.

of Mrs. Gaskell's major works up to Ruth (1853)-- any question about the authorship of the review of North and South (1854), is simply because, by then, Henry Morley seems to have been doing most of the theatrical and literary reviewing in the Examiner (see below, pp. 203-9). In the case of this review of Mary Barton, however, Edward Chapman must have confirmed Forster's authorship, for she replied to him during January, 1849:

> I have not troubled myself about the reviews, except the one or two which I respect because I know something of the character of the writers . . . . . I wish people wd tell authors privately & fully what are their real faults. I, for one should be thankful. I try and find out the places where Mr Forster said I strained after commonplace materials for effect, till the whole book dances before my eyes as a commonplace piece of effect.[1]

About this time Mrs. Gaskell approached Forster on this very question-- an indication of just how much his reviewing mattered to her.[2] It appears that he agreed to reread the book, and give her the kind of private and full criticism that she wanted. Forster spent the first few days of July, 1849, on holiday on the Isle of Wight,[3] and we may assume that he took Mary Barton with him to reread, for Mrs. Gaskell wrote to him in 1854 (after the publication of a new edition

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[1] Ibid., p. 69.

[2] Untraced letter or conversation.

[3] An unpublished letter to John Hill Burton (2 July, 1849) from Bonchurch, Isle of Wight, mentions that he was there "for a few days holiday. . . ." MS, Scottish National Library, C.76 (temporary catalogue number).

of the novel with her husband's lectures appended): "You once took it down-- (or said you did) to the Isle of Wight, & told me you would read it & tell me what you thought of it, just as you do now,-- but the Fates dispersed your plan to empty air. But I will flatter myself, & think you are reading it over your breakfast(s)."[1]

No doubt Forster's answer to this letter included the brief notice of the new edition of Mary Barton which appeared in the Examiner a few days after her letter.[2] It is essentially an abbreviated repetition of his earlier review of the novel, and once again, it fails to notice the imbalance in the book-- perhaps not surprisingly if he had been one of those responsible for the change in its centre of interest from John, to Mary Barton.

II

Forster's review of The Moorland Cottage (1850)-- a Christmas book in the tradition of Dickens-- seems excessive in its praise of something so relatively slight and unimpressive.[3] The story was everything that the Christmas novelette called for: morally didactic, sentimental, and above all, suitable for reading aloud in the family circle. Unfortunately such a formula was bound to cause Mrs. Gaskell to

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[1] Letters of Mrs. Gaskell, p. 287.

[2] Examiner (20 May 1854), pp. 309-10. See also below, pp. 168-70.

[3] Examiner (21 December 1850), pp. 813-14.

indulge in those very weaknesses of her fiction to which it was then most prone. Yet Forster notices none of this. Perhaps he allowed for the conventions of the Christmas story when he praises, without qualifications, its "quiet unaffected sentiment, and . . . its beautiful rectitude of moral judgment"; yet, equally we must allow that Forster's own chief weakness as a critic lay in his toleration— often even enthusiasm— for such excesses of late eighteen-century sentimentality and moralising. Certainly in this he was probably being very much in accordance with the literary taste of his day, and must have been valued (as their reader) by Chapman and Hall partly because of this.

Forster's attitude elsewhere in the review tends to mirror his own proposition that the "depth of a critic's perception" should be measured by "what he praises . . . rather than by what he blames."[1] In fact, his criticism throughout his career shows that he believed a good novelist to be capable of development, and more important— from his point of view— that it was the major part of the critic's job to encourage talent, and to point out the direction of development. He seems to be doing this in this review of The Moorland Cottage. The tale, as we have said, is slight enough, but the better part of his totally positive remarks about it are on the whole sensible, and look forward constructively to Mrs. Gaskell's greater achievements in her later and more substantial novels:

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[1] Household Narrative of Current Events (February 1850), p. 47 (see Appendix B for arguments for ascribing this to Forster).

> The beauty of her writing is its straightforward sincerity. Language flows from her without effort, manifestly without pretence or affectation. . . . She has a subtle capacity for easily detecting and quietly expressing the minutest shades of character. She has a rare sobriety of judgment in estimating social relations. And she brings subjects of the narrowest range within much higher and larger scope, by employing in connection with them a most vivid apprehension of the beauties of form, colour, and sound, and a sense of the influences and loveliness of nature, in which Wordsworth might have been proud to recognise some of the noblest teaching of his muse.

## III

Before turning to Forster's review of Cranford (1853)— a book which he seems to have taken under his personal surveillance— it will be useful to attempt an assessment of his literary relationship with Mrs. Gaskell.

The first point to be made, and underlined, is that there can be no question that he was from the first, a genuine admirer of her approach to fiction, for his reviews of her work (insincere though they may appear to anyone unfamiliar with the optimistic scale of his criticism) are in complete accordance with opinions and tastes he held about fiction in general. Accepting this, we must also accept that his primary motive in championing her fiction in the Examiner, and in his patronage of her art in general,[1] was based simply on his disinterested belief in her literary ability.

Yet, in almost the same breath, it must be admitted that there were secondary considerations of a more practical

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[1]This is shown graphically, in that he read, either in manuscript or in proof, all her major works from Mary Barton (1848) to North and South (1855). See relative letters in text below.

kind motivating the extent of his concern with her career. For, apart from any personal satisfaction it must have given Forster to be on intimate terms with much of the literary, artistic, and dramatic talent of the day, including Mrs. Gaskell, and apart from the fact that such relationships must have helped him to be a better and more sympathetic critic, they were also a great asset to him, particularly in his positions as editor of the Examiner, reader and general adviser to Chapman and Hall, and as a part-owner of Household Words.

There is sufficient evidence to suggest that after Forster became the general editor of the Examiner from the close of 1847, he occasionally called on one or the other of his literary acquaintances to contribute articles, or reviews to the journal.[1] Dickens and Carlyle were two of those who freely responded, and we can conjecture that there might have been others, perhaps even one or two articles (from later on in 1848) from Mrs. Gaskell herself.

Perhaps another likely reason for his patronage of Mrs. Gaskell's (and other's) works, was his relationship with Chapman and Hall. Arthur Waugh, the managing director (1902-1930), referring to tradition and company records (said to have been destroyed by fire in the last war), describes the role that Forster played as their adviser and

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[1]The sudden increase of articles that Dickens and Carlyle alone contributed during 1848 suggests this. See also: The Earl of Lytton, The Life of Edward Bulwer, First Earl of Lytton, 2 vols. (1913), II, 157; also, an unpublished letter to John Hill Burton (13 May 1854), Scottish National Library, C.76 (temporary catalogue number).

reader, and attributes to him much of the success that the company enjoyed in its early days.[1] Thus, it is quite possible that a part of Forster's interest in Mrs. Gaskell was owing to his concern for the business interests of Chapman and Hall in whose welfare he must have profited materially in one way or another. No doubt he also rationalised that such a relatively generous and respectable publisher was desirable from Mrs. Gaskell's point of view, and no doubt it was also obvious to her that much of Forster's concern and expertise went along with her own patronage of Chapman and Hall.[2] At any rate, we know that she was not altogether satisfied with them as publishers,[3] and it may be no coincidence that it was only when Forster became less concerned with the practicalities of the world of letters (after 1855), that she changed her publishers.[4]

Finally, another reason for his fairly close literary attention to Mrs. Gaskell possibly stemmed from his special relationship with the management of Dickens's Household Words-- a relationship which tended to parallel that of

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[1]Arthur Waugh, A Hundred Years of Publishing: being the Story of Chapman and Hall, Ltd (1930), pp. 27, 69-70, 139.

[2]This awareness seems to be reflected in her letter to Eliza Fox (February 1853), in which, writing of the reception by the press of Ruth, she complains: "I don't know of a newspaper which has praised it but the Examiner, wh. was bound to for Chapman's sake-- and that's that, and be hanged to it." Letters of Mrs. Gaskell, p. 223.

[3]A. B. Hopkins, pp. 99-100-- a documented account of her relationship with Chapman and Hall.

[4]Firstly to Sampson Law, Son and Company, and then from 1863 to Smith Elder and Company.

Forster's to Chapman and Hall.[1] It was his role, in other words, to keep a general eye on the welfare of Household Words, and since he had probably first introduced Mary Barton and its author to Dickens, and since he was also her reader at Chapman and Hall, it appears likely that his specific role (with respect to Mrs. Gaskell) on Household Words was as a sort of intermediary.[2]

It was possibly this last point, then, together with the fact that she was also preparing Ruth (1853) for Chapman and Hall, and that Forster was above all genuinely delighted with her fiction, that helps to account for his encouraging letters of good-natured enthusiasm, written to her throughout the serialisation of Cranford in Household Words. Some of these letters are excerpted below:

> . . . this little paper is a piece of reality which delights me in reading, and I find myself thinking of it so pleasantly since I laid it down that for the life of me I could not help writing to you to say so.[3]

> . . . it is very beautiful— It affected me very much— and I lay upon it some part of the reproach that I have hardly slept since Sunday. . . .[4]

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[1] See Appendix B.

[2] See below, pp. 258-9.

[3] From a transcript— by Clement Shorter— of an unpublished letter (7 December 1851). The transcript is in the Brotherton Library, University of Leeds. (This collection of unpublished transcripts will be hereafter indicated as "Shorter"). Forster's reference is to the first Cranford sketch in Household Words (13 December 1851), pp. 265-74.

[4] Ibid. (8 December 1851). The reference is again to her paper in Household Words (13 December 1851), pp. 265-74.

> I have read your Cranford paper with delight. I think it quite as charming as the first. All is perfect. The old Rector quite delicious. Maty more loveable than ever. I cannot tell you what a charm the whole quiet picture has for me, with those shadows from the past.[1]

> I have read your Cranford papers with delight. The papers are universally liked.[2]

> The real truth is that I was already full of gratitude to you for the pleasure the new Cranford sketches had given me. They positively grow better and better. I never saw so nice, so exquisite a touch. The little book which collects them will be a 'hit' if there be any taste left for that kind of social painting.[3]

> The last Cranford was very good indeed. The scene where Miss Matty will change the note delightful, indeed all very good.[4]

Forster's enthusiasm was not lessened when the collected papers were published by Chapman and Hall (1853). He writes in the Examiner:

> This is not a book to be described or criticised other than by a couple of words of advice-- Read it. It is a book you should judge for yourself. If we told you it contained a story, that would hardly be true-- yet read only a dozen pages, and you are among real people, getting interested about them, affected by what affects them, and as curious to know what will come of it all as if it were an affair of your own.[5]

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[1] Ibid. (13 March 1852). The reference is to her paper in Household Words (13 March 1852), pp. 588-97.

[2] Ibid. (16 March 1852).

[3] Ibid. (January 1853). The reference is to her papers in Household Words (8 January 1853), pp. 390-6, and (15 January 1853), pp. 413-20.

[4] Ibid. (9 April 1853). The reference is to her paper in Household Words (2 April 1853), pp. 108-15.

[5] Examiner (23 July 1853), pp. 467.

In fact, the tone of his review in its sheer enthusiasm, compares favourably with the more measured enthusiasm reflected in the review of Bleak House (1853), a few months later. Indeed, a comparison between the two reviews, perhaps points to a growing distance (on literary matters) between Forster and Dickens. Mrs. Gaskell, and not Dickens so much, was becoming, in Forster's mind, we suggest, a foil to the Thackerayan view of society, and it may be that the extent of Forster's concern and enthusiasm over Mrs. Gaskell's fiction, helped to create subtle jealousies in Dickens, which later erupted in 1854, in differences with her, ostensibly over the strike scene in Hard Times (1854).[1]

However it was, this differing outlook, that there may have been developing between Forster and Dickens, points to the limitation in Forster's criticism, that was becoming increasingly apparent in his attitude towards Dickens's later fiction, and fiction in general, during his last few years on the Examiner, and which tended to limit the effectiveness of his criticism to the kind of fiction that was more often being written up to the end of the forties. For, a comparison between his reviews of Rivalry (1840)[2] and Cranford (1853), for example, illustrates that his literary tastes and attitudes were firmly and inflexibly rooted in literature that tended to reflect his equally stable outlook of Unitarian idealism, which in turn (oversimplifying, of

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[1]See below, pp. 166-71.

[2]See above, p. 116-18.

course) was very much a child of the late eighteenth century. While he might, therefore, have been effective as a connector between the eighteenth century and the development of the early Victorian novel, he was simply to a great extent, out of sympathy with the new kind of novel, that in its element of pessimism and cruelty (thinking, as examples, of Vanity Fair, or even, in a lesser way, of Bleak House), was leading towards the fiction of Gissing and Hardy.[1] Perhaps he realised that his critical views were becoming irrelevant in terms of the new fiction, and it may be that this was another reason why he turned away from literary criticism when he did.

However, as we have seen, he could still enthuse with sincerity over Cranford, whether or not "there be any taste left for that kind of social painting."[2] For Cranford, like The Vicar of Wakefield, typified Forster's view of realism, coloured as it was by the optimistic idealism of his Unitarianism. Therefore, in the same review, he approves of its essentially eighteenth century setting of a "dull little country town," with a "parcel of not very wise old maids for its heroines, and for its catastrophe, the failure of a county bank," but, predictably, above all he approves of the humane and sympathetic treatment of the characters.

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[1]Raymond Williams emphasises the increasing scepticism inherent in a "disbelief in the possibility of understanding society," that lead to the new kind of fiction. Raymond Williams, The English Novel from Dickens to Lawrence (1970), p. 15.

[2]See above, p. 153, n.3.

For, "watch people introduced from chapter to chapter," he writes,

> see them unconsciously describe themselves as they reveal their own foibles and vanities— observe as you get to know them better, what unselfish and solid kindnesses underlie their silly trivial ways— and confess that the writer of this unpretending little volume, with hardly the help of any artifice the novelist most relies upon, and showing you but a group of the most ordinary people surrounded by the commonest occurrences of human life, has yet had the art to interest you as by something of your own experience, a reality you have actually met with, and felt yourself the better for having known. Cranford is the most perfect little book of its kind that has been published for many a day.

IV

Forster's review of Ruth (1853)[1]— a book which was published several months before Cranford appeared in book form— presents an interesting comparison with the review of Bleak House. The review of Ruth is not only longer, but it also gives the impression of having been written with greater care and discrimination, and possibly with a greater enthusiasm, all the more noticeable in view of the mixed reception of the book by the press in general. But Forster was utterly sincere in his praise, despite Mrs. Gaskell's assertion that he had been "bound to" praise it in the Examiner, "for Chapman's sake."[2] In fact, she must have been aware that she was being unfair in saying this, since as a regular reader of the Examiner[3] she must have read many

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[1] Examiner (22 January 1853), pp. 51-3.

[2] Letters of Mrs. Gaskell, p. 223.

[3] Forwarded to her each week by Eliza Fox (Letters of Mrs. Gaskell, p. 129).

reviews where Forster was much less enthusiastic about publications issuing from the press of Chapman and Hall. Further, she had evidences of his sincerity, about Ruth, in his letters to her, written even before the book appeared:

> Every part that I have read is written up to the conception and purpose of it. . . . I detect nothing false, nothing exaggerated. Every such temptation is forborne.[1]

> Have no fears about the book. It will far more than sustain the success of "Mary Barton"-- of that I have no doubt.[2]

> Well done! is what I say with all my heart and feeling on reading again, in proof, the last of Ruth. Yet I am not quite sure if it is quite dignified in a hardened critic to confess that he has had neither more nor less than a good cry over these final chapters. Yet ah! how many tears will be shed over her by innocent hearts to whom you will have endeared yourself by telling this story.[3]

> It is a true book, beautifully thought out and written out to the end, and will do infinite good to all who by such means are capable of receiving it.[4]

The almost evangelical tone of the last extract is echoed in the actual review itself, and is, in fact, utterly in keeping with Mrs. Gaskell's purpose in writing the book, as well as with Forster's own view of literature. He writes:

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[1] Shorter (undated).

[2] Ibid. (12 November 1852).

[3] Ibid. (21 December 1852).

[4] Ibid. (17 January 1853).

> No tale of guilt and shame, told without pretence or preaching, has taught more gentle truths of mercy and compassion. We are tempted to use language hardly applicable to fiction; but if in any form fiction may aspire to more than the amusement of leisure hours, we should say that it might be so in such a story as Ruth's. Never did we read one in which upon the whole a clearer balance is held between the false and true, in which a more reverent homage is paid to virtue, in which narrow truths and short-sighted charities are put in more instructive contrast with the very faith they profess to rest upon, or in which the transitory shames of life are so purified by the thoughts of nature and eternity.

Forster is, of course, correct in noticing firstly, and so emphatically, the predominantly religious theme of the novel. Mrs. Gaskell, herself, was to praise a review of Ruth that appeared later in the North British Review,[1] because, "It is so truly religious, it makes me swear with delight."[2] But we must not overlook the fact that Forster was perhaps particularly suited to comment on such a semi-religious novel, since like Mrs. Gaskell, he also viewed life largely from a Unitarian point of view. Indeed, from what we can tell about their religious stands, it would seem that both of them tended towards the then prevailing latitudinarian interpretation of a religion, which was characterised by its relative breadth of thought and toleration.[3]

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[1] Reviewed by J. M. Ludlow, a leader of the Christian-Socialist movement under Kingsley, and a personal acquaintance of Mrs. Gaskell's: North British Review, vol. 19 (May 1853), 151-74.

[2] Letters of Mrs. Gaskell, p. 222.

[3] Edgar Wright discusses Mrs. Gaskell's latitudinarianism in his Mrs. Gaskell: the Basis for Reassessment (1965), pp. 24-8. Forster's liberal religious attitude is obvious in his many writings in the Examiner and elsewhere.

Now, reflecting this, and like the most influential nineteenth-century spokesman of Unitarianism, William Channing, both Mrs. Gaskell and Forster apparently saw literature (including fiction) as a powerful medium for throwing "into circulation through a wide sphere the most quickening and beautiful thoughts which have grown up in men of laborious study or creative genius."[1] Forster especially, in his encouragement of the production of cheap books, and in his support for the repeal of the tax on newspapers, may certainly be expected to have whole-heartedly concurred with Channing's view of the ameliorating influence of literature:

> Books penetrate everywhere, and some of the works of genius find their way to obscure dwellings which, a little while ago, seemed barred against all intellectual light. Writing is now the mightiest instrument on earth. Through this the mind has acquired a kind of omnipresence. To literature we then look, as the chief means of forming a better race of human beings.[2]

But Channing's views on the actual expression of moral truth in literature are even more pertinent to Forster's remarks about Ruth, for as we shall see, such views are echoed by Mrs. Gaskell in her own fiction, and by Forster

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[1] W. E. Channing, "On National Literature," The Complete Works (1841), p. 104. Forster had the 1830 edition of the essay in his library. It is also of a passing interest, as a possible immediate source for the name of Dickens's journal, that the Shakespearean "familiar in our mouths as household words," also occurs in this essay (p. 114).

[2] Ibid., p. 105.

in this review in particular, and in his reviewing in general. Channing writes:

> Moral truth, under which we include everything relating to mind and character, is of a refined and subtle, as well as elevated nature, and requires the joint and full exercise of discrimination, invention, imagination, and sensibility, to give it effectual utterance. A writer who would make it visible and powerful, must strive to join an austere logic to a fervent eloquence— must place it in various lights— must create for it interesting forms— must wed it to beauty— must illuminate it by similitudes and contrasts— must show its correspondence with the outward world— perhaps must frame for it a vast machinery of fiction.[1]

Clearly, for Forster, Thackeray fails to achieve this delicate moral balance— in his later works especially; he fails, as perhaps Dickens also partially fails in his later work (for Forster), to "wed" sufficiently the moral truth of his stories "to beauty." Mrs. Gaskell, on the other hand, from Forster's point of view, handles the subtleties of the characterisation of Ruth (which in itself can be seen as a statement of moral truth) with the delicacy suggested by the remarks of Channing. Forster comments, in his review:

> We cannot think of this poor/gentle girl without the fancies the author summons round her. The scent of gorse on summer evenings, the glancing of showers among the hills, the grand hills looking large under the moonlight, meadows, cottage gardens, woodland haunts, the twittering of birds at sunrise, and all odours, sights, and sounds that make earth beautiful throughout the years, and carry human hopes beyond them, surround Ruth Hilton's image in these volumes. The essential element in her character is a delight in all the changing aspects of nature, and this is employed with beautiful effect to soften what is harsh in her fate. . . . . .

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[1] Ibid., p. 110.

> . . . there is no strain in the pure fresh pictures of nature which make up the background of this tale. They are written, with a poet's true sense of the beautiful, out of a full heart; and into all full hearts they will find their way, as genuine transcripts of impressions gathered among fields and woods and hills, endearing, elevating, redeeming the human emotions they are blended with.

There is more of the same in the review, written in the same almost religious tone, and appropriately illustrated with extracts from the novel. But the characterisation of Ruth is also set against another background— significantly a Unitarian one— that of the Unitarian minister's household, the portrayal of which equally pleases Forster in the same way:

> As for that little household, its humble means, its simple enjoyments, its gentle struggles with poverty, its quaint contentment, its truly Christian aspect, we know of nothing in fiction more unaffectedly pourtrayed; and the character of Ruth as it is developed there, in the midst of those quiet unpretending charities and virtues, is from first to last a creation full of truth and poetry, becoming even grand as all its qualities grow more intense.

Yet, the story of a young fallen girl, welcomed into the household of a Dissenting clergyman, and falsely represented by him to a self-righteous society as a young widow, is, as Forster says, one "of guilt and shame." However, he was running little risk in his total support of the novel.

In the first place, although the book was vigorously attacked from predictably sensitive quarters, we may be fairly certain that the opposition to it was not general. Too many representative figures (representing many shades

of opinion) gave their fullest approval to it,[1] and an appreciable number of reviewers handed it a general commendation, even though, as Hopkins points out, it was "not unmixed with objection."[2]

Secondly, Forster was writing, in the Examiner, for like-minded readers. For the Examiner, then, tended to be aimed towards Liberal intellectuals, many of whom were fellow dissenters-- even Unitarians, the "fashionable" denomination for the mid-nineteenth-century Liberal intellectual.[3]

Finally, in this review, he attempts to answer any detractors of the novel's morality. The book was seen by many as being culpable in much the same way that the Newgate novel was often seen to be-- as an underminer of public morality and authority. Further, the degree of this supposed immorality was heightened in many eyes, because the book dealt realistically and centrally with questionable matters on the level of ordinary contemporary life.

Forster's arguments in defence of the book are consistent with what he had written elsewhere about morality in fiction.

Firstly, he disallows that the book was immoral simply because it features and sympathises with a "fallen woman". He points out that Ruth herself is in fact morally innocent:

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[1]Some of these were: Charlotte Brontë, Cobden, Florence Nightingale, Archdeacon Hare, Dickens, Kingsley, Guizot, and Thomas Carlyle. See Hopkins, p. 126.

[2]Hopkins, p. 126.

[3]The part that Unitarianism played in the major nineteenth-century reform movements, and in the Arts, still has to be worked out.

"Ruth walks purely to the last," he writes. "When very desolate . . . but sixteen years old, the simple-hearted girl becomes a prey to arts that have deceived many an innocent and trusting woman, century after century, throughout the long life of the world." She is seduced, he continues, and "becomes like a primrose trodden down into the dirt; broken and soiled indeed; but her stain like that upon the flower, is from without not from within."

Forster also reminds any critic of the book's morality that even despite this innocence Ruth dies the conventional fictional death of a "fallen woman". From Mrs. Gaskell's point of view, the book was obviously controversial enough without waiving this significant convention. Yet it weakens the argument of Ruth's moral innocence, even though Forster attempts to justify the anomaly: "Many may think the writer presses hardy, in that final catastrophe, against one deflection from the right; but all has been made so clear that the last atonement is really in effect the least, and we feel that the life of Ruth could have no happier ending."

Lastly, in his defence of the characterisation of the Dissenting clergyman, Forster freely admits that the minister's imposition on society, in presenting Ruth as a widowed mother, was fraudulent. But, it "is an error of which only a good man could have been guilty," he asserts. "We cannot conceive," he continues, "a just or tenable objection made to this most delicately drawn character. . . . Never for a moment are we permitted to lose ourselves in any sentimental confusion between right and wrong."

If Forster's views, in this critique, are carefully conventional, even though the questions of right and wrong are not so clearly defined as they had been in most of the Newgate novels he had previously pronounced upon, it was no doubt partly because his own reputation as a moralist was involved. Thus, in essence, he sees the errors of Ruth and the minister as being unintentionally evil, but, nevertheless, errors demanding the same retribution as if the offenders were indeed fully and solely culpable. He neglects to mention the point that Mrs. Gaskell makes— but is admittedly not too insistent on— that an unsympathetic society was also in a large part responsible for their wrong actions. Perhaps he was wise enough not to attempt to claim too much in a review of this length (five columns), especially as a similar claim (in Paul Clifford) had profited Bulwer Lytton's reputation so little.[1] But equally, it may be simply that Forster's conventional public views on morality in fiction at this time, did not allow him much flexibility.

V

Ruth was followed, later in 1853, by Morton Hall, a short story very different in its partial Gothic setting (a Brontë influence), and in its careful avoidance of controversy. The story centres on the fulfilment of a curse uttered on a manor house and its occupant, Sir John Morton, together with his descendants. Forster read it as it

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[1] See above, pp. 65-9, and 81-3.

appeared in the Household Words,[1] and wrote to Mrs. Gaskell that he was "charmed with it," and found it "most beautifully done".[2] A few days later in another letter to her, he was more explicit:

> . . . the whole hangs together so pleasantly—(and the idea is perfectly carried to the end) that I regard it in its way as a wonderful little story of a house.
>
> Anybody but you would have made the tragedy of it unbearable but you have the art of softening this, of relieving it by little homely touches, and putting such a tender sweetness into it, of setting round and neighbouring it with so much quiet good-hearted humour.
>
> I have not told you half-sufficiently how much I like the close. . . .[3]

Forster's letters show that it was the Cranfordian aspect of the story that "charmed" him so much. But among the kinds of stories he was least interested in, were those that drew too heavily on the supernatural in the face of a realistic portrayal of everyday life.[4] Now although Morton Hall is perhaps marginal in this respect, it may have been a reason why Forster apparently did not, in fact, think enough of the story to mention it in the Examiner, even though room could easily have been made available.[5]

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[1] Household Words (19 November 1853), pp. 265-72, and (26 November 1853), pp. 293-302. The dates on Forster's letters (n. 2 and 3, below), suggest that he read the first part in the Household Words, and the second part, in proof.

[2] Shorter (late November 1853).

[3] Ibid. (21 November 1853).

[4] See above, pp. 111-2.

[5] The "Literary Examiner" of 26 November and 3 December 1853, reviewed such unessential works as: History of the Anti-Corn Law League, The Keepsake for 1854, History of the Great and Mighty Kingdom of China, and Essays on Agriculture.

VI

However, Forster was obviously delighted with Mrs. Gaskell's next novel, North and South (1855). In fact his expressed enthusiasm for the novel while it was being planned and written, the contrast between the reviews in the Examiner of North and South and Dickens's Hard Times (1854), together with the comments about Hard Times in the Life of Dickens, are among the factors that suggest again that Forster was tending to champion Mrs. Gaskell's fiction at the expense of Dickens's. We have already ventured that this may have been chiefly because her fiction was closer to Forster's ideal, than that of Dickens's, at this later stage of his career.[1]

From Dickens's point of view, although the criticism of Forster was becoming less relevant to the kind of novel he was trying to write in the fifties, and although he accordingly became less dependent on Forster's literary judgment, we may well expect that there was a certain amount of jealousy and mortification of pride on his part. Throughout his entire career up to 1853,[2] he had been accustomed to almost whole-hearted praise from Forster and the Examiner. Up to then, it had been Thackeray who had paid for any comparisons in the Examiner, and now, for the first time it seemed to be his turn, to the credit of Mrs. Gaskell.

For the sake of clarity, the relationship between

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[1] See above, pp. 154-5.

[2] Ibid.

Forster, Mrs. Gaskell, and Dickens, at this time, is best seen if we view events in their chronological order:

Early in January, 1854, Mrs. Gaskell sent Forster a draft of about the first ten chapters of North and South. He approved of it in the strongest terms:

> I have no doubt at all about the story. You have here got together what I think by far the best material you have yet worked with. Even before the excitement at Drumble I thought so, and when that began I was obliged to walk about in almost as great a taking as Margaret herself. Nothing can be better than all this -- and the nice opportunities of character all through, among the Hales, Thorntons, Mary and Lennoxes I hold to be excellent. But now I say very heartily and earnestly go on with this story whether it be for Dickens or not. . . .[1]

Dickens, to whom she had also sent an outline of the story, also approved, and arranged to have it published serially in Household Words as the feature contribution following the completion of his own Hard Times in the journal.

A day or two after the third instalment of Hard Times had appeared in the Household Words later that year,[2] Mrs. Gaskell wrote to Forster, concerned that Dickens's story threatened to anticipate much in her own. Forster replied that he "regretted to see that the manufacturing discontents" were likely to clash with a part of her story. But he admitted that he knew nothing from Dickens as to how far he

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[1]Shorter (16 January 1854).

[2]Household Words (15 April 1854), pp. 189-94.

meant "to use that sort of material," nor did he think that Dickens yet knew himself.[1] He went on, in this letter, to suggest that she write to Dickens mentioning her own intention to portray an industrial strike, and question Dickens as to whether or not he thought it appropriate to have her story following his in the journal. Forster closed his remarks to Mrs. Gaskell in a passage that seems decidedly partisan, for a supposedly Dickens' man.

> . . . I do not myself anticipate the objection that you do -- because I know with what a different purpose and subsidiary to what quite opposite manifestations of character and passion your strike will be introduced and I am your witness if necessary, that your notion in this matter existed before and quite independently of his. . . .

Mrs. Gaskell took Forster's advice, and voiced her fears openly and directly to Dickens.[2] A few days later (21 April), Dickens sent her a friendly letter, confirming that he had "no intention of striking" in Hard Times.[3] Mrs. Gaskell wrote again to Forster two days later, mentioning her letter from Dickens, which, she said, "altogether. . . sets me at ease."[4]

About a month later, at a time when Hard Times was beginning to attract new readers to Household Words, Forster

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[1]Shorter (18 April 1854).

[2]Letter untraced.

[3]Charles Dickens, The Letters of Charles Dickens, ed. Walter Dexter, Nonesuch edn, 3 vols. (1938). Hereafter referred to as "Letters (N)", II, 554.

[4]Letters of Mrs. Gaskell, p. 281.

reviewed the fifth edition of Mary Barton in the Examiner. Now we have mentioned earlier[1] that in essence he repeated what he had said in his main review of the novel. However, in context of the current success of Hard Times, it may be seen to represent something of a rebuff from Dickens's point of view. For Forster declared that Mary Barton was a novel "which turns solely for its interest to the 'short and simple annals of the poor,'" and one which he was "disposed to place higher than any of the novels which have lately attracted most attention, so entirely worthy of the homeliness and simplicity of its materials is the thoroughly unaffected way in which they are worked out, and the purpose of the writer attained." He went on to notice its "prevailing impression" of "sweetness and tenderness in the extreme," its sympathetic yet fair appraisals, its "charm as a work of fiction," its "delicate" humour, and its restraint. These are qualities that could not so easily be applied to Dickens's later fiction— including Hard Times. In fact, set off against the Examiner's recent reviews of Dickens's works (including by implication, Hard Times itself, the comparison is highly favourable to Mrs. Gaskell.

Up to this point the relationship between Dickens and Mrs. Gaskell seems to have been fairly cordial, but, as A. B. Hopkins points out in his book, "by May something happened to change Dickens' attitude, the cause of which remains a mystery."[2] Now, without claiming this as the

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[1]See above, p.147.

[2]Hopkins, p. 144.

sole cause, it is possible that the review (written in May) of the fifth edition of Mary Barton coming on top of the other partisan notices of Mrs. Gaskell's works in the Examiner, may help to explain Dickens's change of attitude towards her.

Possibly Forster was momentarily trying to redress the balance in the generous review of Wilkie Collins's Hide and Seek[1] in the Examiner that July.[2] For, although Collins had been increasingly taking Forster's place as Dickens's confidant,[3] Forster suppressed any jealousy he must have felt,[4] to find his novel "the first firm step in a career of genuine success." He continues: "we designate him a true artist, and have faith in his future." The notice is long, carefully considered, generous, and furthermore, includes a flattering reference to Dickens: "Admiration of that great novelist cannot lead too many people to emulate his generosity of feeling, his quick warmth of sympathy, and the catholic spirit in his own nature which by his genius he has communicated already in some measure to thousands of his countrymen."

Yet, perhaps more emphatically in an attempt to accommodate Dickens even more directly, is the "Sonnet to Charles

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[1]William Wilkie Collins, Hide and Seek, 3 vols. (1854).

[2]Examiner (8 July 1854), pp. 425-6.

[3]Edgar Johnson, II, 856-7. See also, Bernard Darwin, Dickens, Great Lives Series (1933), pp. 96-7.

[4]James T. Fields, who knew both Dickens and Forster, personally, tells us in his Yesterdays With Authors (Boston (1894), p. 397, that "For Dickens" Forster "had a love amounting to jealousy. He never quite relished anybody else whom the great novelist had a fondness for. . . ."

Dickens, Esq." that follows in the same column immediately after this review. It is tempting to see it as a product of Forster's pen. He had already written a similar sonnet-- "To Charles Dickens"-- in the front of his Life and Times of Goldsmith (1848) and there is no reason to suppose that he could not have written this:

> . . . . . .
> When Moses touched the rock, in the old day,
> Lo! welcome streams most genially fell;
> So doth thy pen delightfully compel,
> The hardest heart to yield unto thy sway.
> Thy themes, as poet, chiefly hope and love,
> Thy aim, the happy good of all thy race;
> Thy power, to mirth and sorrow both can move
> Can smooth our journey to that Higher Place.
> . . . . . .

Later that year, Hard Times was reviewed in the Examiner,[1] and it will suffice to mention here that in my mind there is considerable doubt that it was written by Forster,[2] and that at any rate, the tone is far more restrained than the earlier reviews of Dickens's earlier works, in the Examiner, and again, less genuinely enthusiastic than any by Forster of Mrs. Gaskell's.

North and South was reviewed (in the Examiner) on its completion in Household Words, when it was republished "with some insertions that give greater finish to the story."[3] The review was predictably friendly. "Need we say that a genuine story it is," Forster (or Morley) writes, "and a most cunningly contrived one; full of humour, and of a pathos that few will be able to resist; a story in every

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[1] Examiner (9 September 1854), p. 568.

[2] See below, pp. 203-9.

[3] Examiner (21 April 1855), pp. 244-5.

sense characteristic, and throughout as well written as it is well conceived." It closes: "The book is not only deeply interesting, and full of excellent character, but thoroughly successful in working out its purpose, and a sounder or better purpose it could not have had."

This is the last notice of a work of Mrs. Gaskell's that Forster is at all likely to have written before he retired from his editorship of the Examiner. In fact, after 1855 both went their own ways. Mrs. Gaskell, as we have said turned to a new publisher for her novels, while Forster increasingly turned away from the world of journalism and fiction. In 1856, Mrs. Gaskell wrote to Edward Chapman asking for some news of Forster,[1] and by 1857, when she wrote to the publisher, George Smith, she appears to have lost all contact with him.[2]

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[1] Letters of Mrs. Gaskell, p. 407.

[2] Ibid., p. 446.

# CHAPTER 6

## FORSTER AND DICKENS

### I

The relationship between Forster and Dickens was so close and inclusive that a consideration of it obviously merits a much fuller study than there is room for here. Nevertheless, this chapter can claim to cast additional light on an aspect of their relationship (Forster as a reviewer of Dickens) about which a number of ill-founded assumptions have long received a wide acceptance.

Yet, before examing the actual critiques (in the Examiner) of Dickens's fiction, it will be helpful to sum up what is now known about their general relationship:

It is well known that the two probably first met, socially, through Ainsworth, on Christmas Day 1836, that apart from occasional differences, they remained good friends until Dickens's death in 1870, and that Forster, at the request of Dickens, was both his executor and biographer. In fact, it is clear that, on the whole, Forster was far from exaggerating the closeness of their personal and literary relationship, in the Life.[1]

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[1] John Forster, The Life of Charles Dickens, 3 vols. (1872-4). I have referred to the Everyman edition (1927) throughout this thesis. However, references are given by book, chapter, and page for an easy reference in other editions. I have used this particular edition not only because it is widely available, but also, because in order to write this chapter, I needed a scissors-and-paste compilation of Forster's critical commentary in the Life, and it so happened that I had several copies of the Everyman edition to hand.

Forster's role as literary agent, reader, and adviser to Dickens, is quite well documented (as far as they go) in various biographies of the novelist, in the files of the Dickensian and other literary journals, as well as in their own correspondence. Yet, even though it is generally acknowledged that Forster's experience in law and letters was of great importance to Dickens, there is, surprisingly, nowhere a clear, scholarly, and comprehensive account of their "business" relationship. This is perhaps largely because of a superabundance of material, and also because of a belief that the full extent of Forster's literary involvement with Dickens is given in the Life.

Indeed, that we do not yet have a full appreciation of the part that Forster played in Dickens's literary career, is suggested perhaps, above all, by a recent examination of Dickens's previously underestimated contribution to the files of the Examiner while Forster was its literary, and later, general editor (1835-55).[1]

Here, by studying Dickens's known contributions to the Examiner (from 1837 to possibly 1851), in context, we can see that during at least 1848 and 1849, he was very much an integral part of a group of journalists that thought along similar lines. Much more will have to be known about the

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[1]Alec W. Brice, "Dickens and the 'Examiner': some Newly Identified Essays", M. Litt. Thesis, University of Edinburgh, 1968. A number of the chapters in this thesis have been published jointly with Professor K. J. Fielding. This represents, to date, the fullest account of Dickens's contributions to the Examiner.

other contributors to the journal if we are to be able to trace the full pattern of influences; but it is apparent already that the subject matter, the attitudes, and the tone of his own Household Words (especially in 1850-1) was influenced very strongly by his close association with the Examiner and its staff, and with its general editor (1847-55), John Forster.[1]

It is becoming clearer, also, that in his later novels especially (thinking particularly of Bleak House and Hard Times), Dickens used the journalistic techniques and attitudes, developed in part by this journalistic relationship with Forster and the Examiner. It has also been pointed out, elsewhere,[2] that one of "the most striking aspects of Dickens' technique as a novelist is the way in which he used topical issues in order to lead himself and his readers into the heart of the imaginary world of his fiction," and it is perhaps only predictable that many of the issues he had written about in the Examiner should have become central topical issues in his subsequent fiction. Moreover, although this topicality is never the true subject of a novel, as Professor Fielding and myself have pointed out: "it plays an important part in the author's communication with his readers, is even part of his language, and is bound

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[1] Ibid.

[2] K. J. Fielding, and A. W. Brice, "Bleak House and the Graveyard", Dickens the Craftsman: the Strategies of Presentation, ed. Robert B. Partlow (Illinois, 1970), p. 115. See also by the same authors, "Charles Dickens on 'The Exclusion of Evidence'", The Dickensian, LXIV (September 1968), 131-40, and LXV (January 1969), 35-41.

up with both the form and substance of his work."[1] This being so, it is apparent that until we have a yet clearer picture of the influence of the Examiner and its editor upon the topicality in Dickens's fiction, a significant chapter will be missing in our understanding of the relationship between Dickens and Forster, and-- more important-- of our understanding of Dickens himself, as a novelist. But a detailed consideration of all of this lies outside the scope of this thesis. It is part of an independent study-- which continues.

Other immediately less significant extensions of their journalistic ties have also been overlooked. These are the roles that Forster seems to have played as the literary and legal factotum for Household Words, and as a contributor to its monthly supplement, The Household Narrative of Current Events. These roles are examined more closely in Appendix B.[2] Briefly, they call attention to the fact that the journalistic tie between Dickens and Forster that reflects so much on Dickens's mature fiction did not end abruptly when the novelist commenced with his own journal in 1850, but actually continued (with qualification, as outlined in the appendix) until at least 1855.

If Forster was useful to Dickens as a literary and personal adviser for most of his life, and if his editorship

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[1] K. J. Fielding and A. W. Brice, "Bleak House and the Graveyard", p. 115.

[2] See below, pp.

of an influential Radical journal was psychologically and practically useful to Dickens (in that he could both let off steam anonymously when he wanted to within its pages, and in that he must at least have learned quite a lot about newspaper management from Forster), nowhere, perhaps, was Forster closer to him, in the early days, than in their mutual love of the theatre.

Forster had been interested in the theatre from his youth. His first published essay written at the age of fifteen was entitled, "A Few Thoughts in Vindication of the Stage."[1] A year later a play of his, in two acts, called Charles at Tunbridge, was performed at the Newcastle Theatre. At twenty he became the drama critic of the True Sun, and the following year (1833), he was writing the theatrical column in the Examiner. Much more could be said about this side of Forster, including his close and idolatrous friendship with Macready (emphasised by his own affectation of the tragedian's stoop and manner of speaking), his amateur acting with Dickens and Lytton, his interest on the behalf of dramatists and actors, and his efforts towards preserving Shakespeare's house. However, once again, a full consideration lies outside the limitations of this thesis.

Dickens's obsession for the theatre is well known, and needs no further comment here, except to make the pertinent point that both he and Bulwer-Lytton were also friends and admirers of Macready, and came very much into the sphere of his influence. In fact, it is possible that indirectly, at

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[1]John Forster, "A Few Thoughts in Vindication of the Stage", Newcastle Magazine (June 1827).

least, the Macready school of drama was another appreciable influence on their writing, as well as possibly on Forster's reviewing, and yet the full significance of this very creative relationship seems to have been largely overlooked.

Obviously a proper consideration of this whole question needs more space than we are able to give it here, and similarly there has been no room for a detailed consideration of just what Macready's theatre actually was. We know from contemporary reviews and from his journals that it tended towards the prevailing taste of sentiment, and that by today's standards it would have appeared melodramatic. Nevertheless, it was a far cry from the excesses that had preceded it, and a vast improvement in its greater sense of artistic responsibility.

Apart from the possibility that the influence of Macready may have left an impression on Forster's reviewing of fiction, and on the early works of Dickens and Lytton, there is the possibility, too, that it was the theatrical orientation of the two novelists, with Macready as a focus, and with Forster as a further link, that was responsible for a great deal of the interchange of influence that is traceable in their fiction. Once again, this all awaits a separate study.[1]

Up to about 1852, Dickens and Forster, in general, appear to have held similar views about politics. But

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[1]Any full length study along the lines that I have suggested here, should begin with a reading of Alan S. Downer's, The Eminent Tragedian: William Charles Macready (1966), and of Charles H. Shattuck's, Bulwer and Macready: a Chronicle of the Early Victorian Theatre (Illinois, 1958).

since the early eighteen-forties, Forster had become less of a Radical, and had become increasingly more of an Establishment figure. Thomas Cooper, the Chartist, saw him (with some prejudice) as a "bitter personification of whiggery."[1] By 1855, his near orthodoxy, and his services rendered to the Whigs in the Examiner, was rewarded by an appointment as a Secretary to the Commission of Lunacy. Dickens, on the other hand, gradually lost any faith he might have had in the Parliamentary system, and by January 1854, he was complaining in a letter to Robert Rawlinson that "as to Parliament, it does so little and talks so much that the most interesting ceremony I know of in connection with it was performed . . . by one man, who just cleared it out, locked up the place, and put the keys in his pocket."[2] Later (30 September 1855) he wrote to Forster, "I really am serious in thinking . . . that representative government is become altogether a failure with us . . . and that the whole thing has broken down since that great seventeenth-century time."[3] A month later in a letter to Macready, he declared that he had "lost hope even in the ballot."[4]

Although their religious views probably had more in common than otherwise,[5] some essentials of Unitarian

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[1] Thomas Cooper, Life of Thomas Cooper: Written by Himself (1872), p. 336.

[2] Letters of Dickens (N), p.

[3] Ibid., p.

[4] Ibid., p.

[5] The most full consideration of Dickens and his religious views is W. R. G. Kent's Dickens and Religion (1930).

philosophy which found Dickens's later novels wanting, seem to be stressed in Forster's criticism of fiction. I have suggested this in the previous chapter on Forster and Mrs. Gaskell.[1] The moral emphasis in a story, so Forster seems to have felt, must be constructive, and optimistic, and these qualities he apparently found hard to see in Dickens's later novels from Bleak House onwards. It is this difference in point of view that seems to feature largely in the perceptible distancing of the two friends after about 1853.

But events anyway seemed to be drawing the two friends apart, especially after 1855, the year of Forster's withdrawal from Household Words and from the world of journalism in general: at the close of 1855, Forster accepted a civil appointment from the Whigs, while by this time Dickens had given up almost all hope in the political system of the day; the unimpeachable Forster became married to a model of respectability in 1856, while at about the same time Dickens was having an "affair" with an actress; finally, Forster became increasingly ill and testy with the disease that was eventually to kill him many years later, while Dickens suffered more and more under the mental stresses of his private life.

That these events affected their friendship is suggested, from Dickens's point of view, in a letter to Macready (27 December 1868):

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[1]See above, pp. 158-60.

> I was at poor Miss Forster's [Forster's sister, Elizabeth] funeral on Christmas Eve. All things considered, I thought Forster better. But those Commissioners are a duller set of fellows than he was ever used to consort with, before he joined them, and I cannot but feel that he has got into an old way which is not wholesome. He has lost interest in the larger circle of tastes and occupations that used to girdle his life, and yet has a morbid sort of dissatisfaction in having subsided into an almost private personage. I notice this change in him, as influencing his health quite as much as his bodily illness, I think.[1]

Thus, from the close of 1855 (even from perhaps a few years earlier), their friendship, although still appreciable, was never to be quite the same.

## II

Now there are over seventy separate notices or mentions of the works of Dickens in the literary section of the Examiner between 1836 and 1865. A great many of them are merely prefaced extracts from his works, and tell us relatively little about what the reviewer thought about his fiction. A large number, also, refer to the same novel, and can sometimes be grouped (with caution) as single units of criticism. Thus, superficially at least, we seem to have a fairly compact and manageable body of criticism about Dickens's fiction. But just how wrong this impression is, can be seen by a glance through Appendix D (pp. 170-7 ). It is chiefly the fact that there were at least four reviewers of Dickens's works that complicates any consideration of them as a single body of criticism-- despite the fact that Forster was the over-all literary editor.

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[1] An unpublished letter in the Pierpont Morgan Library, New York. A transcript was very kindly loaned to me by Professor K. J. Fielding.

In the past it seems to have been customary to have assumed that at least the major notices, up to 1855, were by Forster. On the face of it, a near blanket ascription to Forster seems to have been a reasonable assumption: Forster was Dickens's closest friend, and in the well-documented instances of Landor, Browning, and Lytton (all close friends), he apparently had no scruples about reviewing _their_ works; furthermore, he knew what Dickens was trying to do in his fiction, since they had discussed the novels together, and Forster had read and corrected most of them while they were still in manuscript or proof form. Besides he was, after all, supposedly responsible for the reviewing in the _Examiner_ until 1855. In fact there seemed to be no reason to suppose why he should not have been the most suitable person for reviewing Dickens's fiction. Seemingly supporting this view, is the fact that Forster quotes freely from almost all of the notices from 1836 to 1865 in his _Life of Dickens_.[1]

Now, it is the primary aim of this part of the present chapter to demonstrate how inaccurate this view is. For, there is, in fact, abundant evidence to show that Forster did _not_ write most of the major notices of Dickens's fiction in the _Examiner_, even though he quoted extensively from many of them in his compilation of the critical commentary in the _Life_.

Since we are dealing with a great deal of material here, and in order to avoid excessive cross-referencing, repetition,

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[1]See below, Chapter 7.

and confusion, I have dealt with the notices in a roughly chronological order, placing extra details of evidence for ascription to Appendix D. In this way, the narrative will advance, points will be made systematically, and by the close of the following chapter, evidences for ascription, and evaluations of the new state of things will have been fully presented.

Specifically, then, it will be the purpose of the remainder of this chapter, firstly, to attempt to lay out, as straightforwardly as possible, some of the evidences for the respective ascriptions that I have made, and secondly, to draw a number of conclusions that arise from them. In the next chapter, I attempt to illustrate how Forster compiled the critical commentary in the Life (and to suggest how it may be viewed in its new light), and secondly, I attempt to set down what Forster actually thought, critically, of Dickens's fiction. Finally, it will be the purpose of the next chapter, and an appropriate close to the thesis to suggest, briefly, how we should now view Forster as a critic in general.

## III

As a glance at Appendix D shows, the four chief reviewers of Dickens's fiction between 1836 and 1865, in chronological order, were (according to my judgment) Albany Fonblanque, John Forster, Leigh Hunt, and Henry Morley.

All of them were closely connected with the Examiner,[1] and all were enthusiastic about Dickens's work. Now, whether it was by sheer good luck, or whether it was a reflection on Forster's editorial skill, it so happens that each of them was pre-eminently suitable for reviewing what he did of Dickens's, when he did. Thus, if my ascriptions are correct, Fonblanque, known for his sparkling wit and polished literary style, notices the wit and exuberance of Dickens's earliest work; Forster, characteristically, notices the realism of the developing novelist; Hunt, the lifelong reformer and poet, emphasises the growing social awareness, and the maturing sense of poetry in the later Dickens, while as might be expected,[2] Morley notices the greater plot control, and sense of unity in the mature Dickens.

Viewed, therefore, as a single body of criticism, these seventy-odd notices represent a singular cross-section of contemporary critical comment, most appropriately compiled, and one that stresses with occasional adroitness the various strengths at each stage of Dickens's literary development. Further, these notices were written by men close to Dickens, personally and idealogically-- men who had also, no doubt,

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[1]At the time of writing their respective reviews in the Examiner, Fonblanque was the editor; Forster, the literary and dramatic editor; Hunt, the founder of the journal, and a regular contributor (as correspondence between Forster and Hunt reveals), and Morley was at first the dramatic, and later the literary editor of the Examiner.

[2]See below, pp. 105-6.

discussed the novels with Dickens himself.[1] Now, whether this collection took the shape it did, partly (as we suspect) by design, and partly by chance, or whether sheer convenience decided who the reviewers should be, we may reasonably suspect that Forster noticed its completeness and appropriateness when he decided to edit it, and use it surreptitiously, in his Life of Dickens.[2]

IV

The first notice, in the Examiner, then, of a work of Dickens— with our emphasis at this stage on evidences of ascription rather than on critical content— is Sketches by "Boz" (1836).[3] Now, in my opinion, this brief notice of fifteen lines, prefacing a short extract from the book, was most likely written by Fonblanque. If I am correct in this ascription, it would be only too natural for the notice to remark on Dickens's quick "perception of the ludicrous," his "rich vein" of humour, and his "racy" and "agreeable" style. These are exactly the predominant characteristics of Fonblanque's own manner of writing.[4] Yet apart from this, and apart from the fact that Fonblanque was still reviewing fiction regularly during 1836, Forster himself gives

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[1]With the possible exception of the earliest notices in 1836, which were written before either Forster or Fonblanque knew Dickens personally.

[2]See below, Chapter 7.

[3]Examiner (28 February 1836), pp. 132-3.

[4]Professor K. J. Fielding and myself found this - to our frustration - when we were occasionally obliged to rely on stylistic evidences alone in our attempts to identify Dickens's journalistic articles in the Examiner.

a possible clue to ascription in the Life: "I remember still with what hearty praise the book was first named to me by my dear friend Albany Fonblanque," he writes.[1] Now, we would suggest that he "remembered" this, because he wrote this section of the Life with Fonblanque's notice in front of him as a reference, just as he referred to almost all of the other reviews of Dickens's fiction in the Examiner.[2] Besides, taking what Forster says above literally, in one sense, it appears that he became acquainted with the book first, whereas the reviewer in the Examiner had "first read them in the publications in which they originally appeared." Yet, after all, the ascription must remain uncertain for the time being, because of Forster's (intentional?) ambiguity in his reference to Fonblanque's first "naming" of the book.

However, further evidence suggesting that the notice of Sketches by Boz is probably by Fonblanque, is the likelihood that it is one of a series.

In the interests of clarity and space, the three brief notices of the monthly numbers of The Pickwick Papers will be treated collectively, all of them being probably assignable to Fonblanque.[3] They follow, chronologically, the notice of the Sketches, repeat the main critical points of that notice, and occasionally indulge in an element of facetiousness typical of Fonblanque's journalism.[4] Thus

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[1] Life, I, 5, 60.

[2] See Appendix E.

[3] Examiner (4 September 1836), pp. 563-5; (9 October 1836), pp. 647-8; (6 November 1836), pp. 710-11. Notices of numbers 1-6, 7, and 8, respectively.

[4] See, for example, Albany Fonblanque, The Life and Labours of Albany Fonblanque, ed. S. B. de Fonblanque (1874).

Dickens's perception of the "ludicrous" is noted in all four notices, as is the "unaffected" and "racy" style. Further there are a number of references that refer forward or backward to other notices in the series. For example, the notice of the seventh number of Pickwick notes that "the style continues racy and unaffected," and that it continues to exhibit a "rich vein of comic invention." These comments echo those in the notice of the Sketches, in which the reviewer noted the "unaffected, racy, and agreeable" style, and the "rich vein" of humour. But the web of cross-references although individually unimpressive, collectively strongly suggest a series, and a definite point of view.

V

Also supporting the view that Fonblanque wrote these first notices, is the fact that the next six were clearly written by a different hand, and by a critic who emphasised the "realism" of Dickens's fiction. In fact, on both counts, the new reviewer was most likely Forster. The stylistic features, and the emphasis on realism are characteristically his, even though it might be argued that there is a change in the tone of the novel itself.

Thus, the first of these notices (probably by Forster), of the ninth number of the Pickwick Papers,[1] stresses the "sharper and nicer touches of character," commends the sketch of George Nupkins, the magistrate, as being "done to the life," finds Mr. Jinks, his court clerk, to be a "likeness

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[1] Examiner (4 December 1836), pp. 775-6.

of exquisite reality; touching and even painful for its truth," and observes of the extracts quoted in the notice that "there are no touches in a picture by Hogarth, more true to nature. . . ."

The next notice of Pickwick,[1] is again, in my judgment, most likely by Forster. For, in the same way, it emphasises the "truth and power" of Dickens's delineation of the Fleet prison (fifteenth number). "The reality of the whole is wonderful," it asserts, and its "dreadful restlessness" is "pictured throughout with the minute reality of a Defoe." "All of it is real life and human nature," Forster summarises, "it is a succession of actual scenes, the actors of which take up a place in the memory."

Fortunately, this last review seems to be more precisely credited to Forster in a letter from Dickens (2 July 1837).[2] Dickens, who was not likely to be mistaken about the identity of the reviewer, wrote to thank Forster for his "beautiful notice," after seeing it in that week's Examiner. He was probably also referring back to the previous review of Pickwick when he commented in his letter that Forster's "notices" made him "grateful but very proud." Now, his remark, elsewhere in the letter, that he felt Forster's "rich, deep appreciation of my intent and meaning" more than the "most glowing abstract praise," hardly refers to the slight and superficial notices that I have tentatively ascribed to Fonblanque. But, these two reviews by Forster--

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[1] Examiner (2 July 1837), pp. 421-2.

[2] Charles Dickens, The Letters of Charles Dickens, eds. Madeline House, Graham Storey et al., Pilgrim Edn. (Oxford, 1965- ), I, 280-1. Hereafter referred to as Letters (P)

indeed all of Forster's early major notices of Dickens's fiction-- surely reflect what Dickens was trying to achieve at this stage, if Forster is correct when he observes in the Life:

> What I had most indeed to notice in him, at the very outset of his career, was his indifference to any praise of his performances on the merely literary side, compared with the higher recognition of them as bits of actual life, with the meaning and purpose on their part, and the responsibility on his, of realities rather than creatures of fancy.[1]

Thus, Dickens must have been equally pleased with the relatively lengthy notice of the first half of Oliver Twist.[2] Again, because of its emphasis and literary style, the notice was almost certainly written by Forster. He found it a "veritable history," and one in which "the art of copying from nature" as it really existed in the lower classes had "not been carried to greater perfection. . . ." for, "the absolute truth and precision of its delineation" were not "to be disputed." There is more of the same in the notice.

Now, it would check the flow of our narrative if each of Forster's notices (most of them minor ones) were discussed in any detail, at this stage. Besides, it turns out that after all, Forster was not the chief reviewer of Dickens's fiction in the Examiner. Therefore, having given the gist of his critical emphasis, we would now refer the reader to Appendix D, where I have listed some evidences for the

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[1] Life, II, 1, 70.

[2] Examiner (10 September 1837), pp. 581-2.

ascription of his notices in a convenient note form.

So far, then, it appears that Fonblanque was the first, though fairly inconsequential, reviewer of Dickens in the Examiner, and that he was followed, with much greater effect, by Forster. But, from the close of 1838, another more considerable critic— Leigh Hunt— seems to have dominated the journal's reviewing of Dickens's fiction.

## VI

At some time during late June 1838, it appears that Leigh Hunt had written to Dickens asking him for some copies of some of his recent work.[1] Several weeks after his request, Dickens forwarded a parcel together with a letter (?13 July):

> Here is the unhappy parcel which . . . has been lying on my table in the dust of fourteen days.
> It contains the first four numbers of my new work, a portion of Oliver Twist . . . and an American Edition of Pickwick. . . . Do me the favor to read Oliver and Nickleby first. Of the latter work I have directed the publishers to send you all future numbers regularly; and of the former I will send you more anon, if it interest you— an old stager— sufficiently.
> . . . . . If you can only find it in that green heart of yours to tell me one of these days that you have met . . . with any thing that felt like a vibration of the old chord you have touched so often and sounded so well, you will confer the truest gratification on [me].[2]

Leigh Hunt responded with enthusiasm, a week or so later. He wrote in his letter (dated, July) to Dickens:

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[1] Untraced, but ascertainable because Hunt refers back to it in the postscript of his letter to Dickens (See footnote 1, next page)

[2] Letters (P), I, 414.

> . . . . . Your books-- How much I wish I could say all I think & feel about them! . . . I shall, by & by, be able to talk or write more about them (if I am not assuming too much in thinking that my notions are of any consequence to you); but permit me to say briefly meanwhile, that I admire you for your wit & humour, & love you as a humanist. . . . Your genius for the serious, & even the terrible, as well as the lively, indeed surprised me, for I had known you hitherto only through the medium of extracts in other works, and one solitary number of Nickleby; and if I think you sometimes push the terrible too far, or into the regions of ultra-effect & melodrama, there is that in a true genius like yours (permit a much older man to say) which will ever know the nobleness of continuing to learn. . . . What rejoices me particularly in your having so much heart . . . is, that it makes me anticipate a Shakspearian lot for you . . . and your continuing . . . to inculcate the belief in goodness & beauty, & make the world know that they have hearts in their own bosoms, as well as galls & "bad livers".[1]

About seven or eight weeks still later, there appeared in the literary section of the Examiner a notice of numbers five and six of Nicholas Nickleby.[2] Now, there are strong grounds for believing it to have been written by Leigh Hunt himself.

We have seen that he had expressed a desire to "talk or write" about Dickens's fiction "by & by," and we can assume that he was now receiving the regular monthly instalments, as Dickens had arranged. Further, we are not aware of his having written about Dickens's early fiction elsewhere. Furthermore, convincing evidence for his having written this notice comes from a comparison of his letter (quoted above)

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[1] Ibid., I, 685-6.

[2] Examiner (23 September 1838), pp. 595-6.

with the notice itself.

Hunt's criticism, in the letter, that Dickens "sometimes pushed the terrible too far, or into the ultra-effect & melodrama," finds repetition in the notice: "The author provokes us now and then . . . by the tone of exaggeration he indulges [in]." However, there is another, more persuasive, parallel. In his letter, Hunt writes that he "admires" Dickens for his "wit and humour", and "loves" him as a "humanist." He asserts that it is because of Dickens's "having so much heart" in this way, that he is able to "anticipate a Shakspearian lot" for him. All this appears, in a modified form, in the last paragraph of the notice, following a brief extract describing Miss La Creevy:

> Now this is one of those cheerful, good-hearted passages which, as well as those many others in which Mr Dickens shows a zeal for the social and political welfare of his fellow-creatures— add affection for him to our admiration, and enable us to anticipate the feelings with which posterity shall regard him as the indeed worthy companion of the GOLDSMITHS and FIELDINGS.

The style of the notice also very strongly suggests Hunt's poetic awareness, and reveals a light-hearted diversive rather chatty tone— often a Hunt hallmark; for example, he writes: "Nickleby is much superior to Pickwick (it is curious to observe, by the bye, what a tendency, as a punster might say, Mr Dickens's ear has to the i, — Pickwick, Twist, Nickleby, &c.) in the force and precision of its characters. . . ." The effervescent quality of tone is sustained throughout much of the notice.

Perhaps worth drawing attention to, also, is the fact that Hunt's use of the compounds "ultra thinking" and "ultra-

effect", in his letter to Dickens, seems to find a parallel in the "ultra-worldly" used in the notice. It is a small point, but after a conscientious search, it appears that neither Fonblanque nor Forster can be seen to have used such a compound in their own writing. At any rate, one's impression of the style of the review is that it is surely not Forster's.

Other evidence-- in some ways the most convincing-- rests on a positioning of this notice within a network of cross-references (from other notices by Hunt) too complex to detail here, but a part of which is given in Appendix D.

Yet, after all, Forster himself appears to give us the key to its ascription. In the Life-- in reference to the letter of Miss Squeers to Ralph Nickleby-- Forster writes: "There was a piece . . . of which Leigh Hunt exclaimed on reading it that it surpassed the best things of the kind in Smollet that he was able to call to mind."[1] Now, in the Examiner's notice we find an edited version of the letter, preceded by an assertion that it "equals the best things of the kind in Smollet;-- nay, surpasses any that we can call to mind." In view of this significant cross-reference, then, and in the light of all the other evidence, the ascription seems decisive.

It also appears to follow that if this notice is by Hunt, then the notice that appeared in the Examiner, on publication of the completed work, is his also.[2] There is

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[1] Life, II, 4, 97-8.

[2] Examiner (27 October 1839), pp. 677-8.

the same criticism of Dickens's "occasional sins against verisimilitude on the side of exaggeration," the same praise for his "kindness of heart," with the same emphasis on his humanity.[1] One notices that there is even an "ultra-exquisite" echoing the "ultra-worldly" of his previous notice, and the "ultra thinking" and "ultra-effect" of his letter to Dickens.[2] Further, the notice also ends in capitals, in very much the same way as did the previous notice: "We see him,at no distant day, if he does entire justice to his powers, the not unworthy successor of our GOLDSMITHS and FIELDINGS."

Now, the style is manifestly that of Hunt's, and there is at least one parallel between this notice and his writing outside the Examiner.[3] There seems, in fact, to be little point in accumulating evidences here in this case,[4] and a full account of the generally very fine notice belongs elsewhere.[5]

If we conclude, then, that Hunt wrote at least two notices of Dickens's fiction in the Examiner, we are again led to examine his correspondence a little closer.

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[1]E.g. Hunt writes: "It is only in the presence of a writer of genius that the affinities and sympathies of high and low, in regard to the customs and usages of life, are so revealed. For it is not more by the bonds of a common humanity, than by the alliances of common habits, that we are all linked together."

[2]See above, pp. 192-3.

[3]Cf. Hunt's view of Tom Jones in this notice, and in "Fielding and Tom Jones", Tatler (6 December 1831), III, 537.

[4]See evidences listed in note form in Appendix D.

[5]"Leigh Hunt and Dickens", an essay by the present author, for publication hereafter.

Later that year, Forster wrote to Hunt (5 November), conveying Dickens's "very kindest regards," and informing him that at the novelist's request, he was to "receive an Oliver Twist 'in three volumes' among the first who receive it. . . ."[1] It is very likely that Dickens's special mark of favour was motivated largely by his pleasure with Hunt's review of Nicholas Nickleby.[2] Indeed, this likelihood seems to be confirmed by the tone and substance of a letter from Dickens to Hunt, written a few days after Forster's note (?10 November):

> I send you herewith one of the earliest copies of Oliver Twist, and I would at the same time complete your set of Nickleby if I remembered what was the last number you had . . . I cannot bear the notion of your being behind-hand . . . I should like to have a note from you when you have skimmed over such part of Oliver as is new to you. . . .[3]

Now, it appears that at some time after the receipt of this letter and the book, Hunt began to prepare some critical comments (together with some extracts, apparently marked in his new copy of the novel), for inclusion in the Examiner. Perhaps he wrote them at Forster's request— certainly with his approval, for shortly afterwards Forster forwarded another copy of the novel,[4] assumably so that Hunt might not be without one, while his own marked copy was being used for

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[1]Luther A. Brewer, My Leigh Hunt Library: the Holograph Letters (Iowa, 1938), p. 250.

[2]I.e., the first review of Nicholas Nickleby by Hunt (23 September 1838).

[3]Letters (P), I, 452.

[4]Not his presentation copy which is in the "Forster Collection" unmarked.

the actual type-setting Forster writes:

> I send Oliver Twist-- may I send back for your marked copy and the notes you will kindly write for me, at 10 oclock tomorrow? We can exchange copies again next week.
> I told Dickens last night what you were going to do for him and me-- whereat he rejoiced much and was grateful exceedingly.[1]

There are only two notices of Oliver Twist, in the Examiner that this note could possibly be referred to.[2] In my judgment, both of them seem to be by Hunt. The first appears to have been written in response to Dickens's own request (in his letter to Hunt) for some critical comments about the closing scenes of the story. The notice is a long one-- four and a half columns-- and is largely made up of inter-connected extracts from the last number of the novel. The critical comments introducing them are high praise, and, in general, reflect fairly closely what Hunt had said of Dickens's fiction in his other notices. He mentions, also, his intention to "enter into a critical examination of the entire novel," the following week.

Accordingly, the Examiner of the next week again included a four column notice of Oliver Twist. This time, because there is much more critical comment, the notice seems even more emphatically to have been written by Hunt. Conveniently, it opens with a reference to the notice of the previous week, that clearly seems to place the two notices under one authorship.

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[1] Brewer, p. 251. Undated.

[2] Examiner (18 November 1838), pp. 723-5, and (25 November 1838), pp. 740-1.

The appreciation of the "humanism" immanent in the works of Dickens-- high-lighted in almost all of Hunt's notices-- is again featured here:

> . . . if ever a man of genius appeared whose lot would seem an enviable one, it is that of Mr Dickens; for he has been acknowledged as such at once, is young, popular, prosperous, and doing good. Of what other writer in the annals of literature could this be said? -- at least under such extensive circumstances of the combination of fame with utility? Who like him, ever promised to bring reforms into the Augean stables of mercenary schools and prisons and workhouses, by the apparently light arms of humour and the gentle ones of pathos? by shaking the air around them with bursts of laughter, and purifying it with the uncanting tears of the very criminals themselves?
>
> . . . . . .
>
> . . . He is the combiner of severe utilitarianism, with the laughing and tearful sympathies that are least looked for in its company. He has as solid, existing, every-day life for the ground-work of his eduring wit and tenderness, as if he had superseded the old petrifying process of the magician in the Arabian tale, and struck the prisons and parish government of his country into palpable life for ever.

The old reformer, Hunt, closes his comments with a characteristic observation:

> Write such books as Oliver Twist for ever, DICKENS, varied only as advancing years will vary them, and forever will communities, as well as individuals, have reason to be grateful.

In December, 1844, Forster sent a copy of The Chimes to Hunt. He enclosed a note with it:

> My dear Hunt-- I have it in charge to give you this little book from Dickens - with his most hearty and kind remembrance -- And I accompany it with a most boring request of my own. Hope you'll be able to forgive me for making it. It is that you send me, by Thursday morning -- any little thing by way of note or suggestion that may occur

to you about the story, and its treatment. Not a formal notice-- nothing of the kind.[1]

The rest of the note goes on to say that Forster was writing a review of the story for the Edinburgh Review, and that that was why he needed "a new hint, a fresh and new impression . . . from . . . other points of view" for the Examiner account.

Forster wrote to Hunt again a day or so later ( 19 December) informing him that he had received his review of The Chimes, but that, as the letter explains, he had been obliged to reword it:

> I have your notice entire-- precisely as you wrote it-- and shall preserve it for Dickens.[2] I have taken great liberties with it, my dear Hunt, which I must entreat you, in this special instance, to forgive.
>
> There was a particular reason that I should, in some points, manner it in my own way: though no reason to withhold from Dickens a knowledge of the kindness on your part toward him.
>
> Will you forgive me? I feel that I have need of your forgiveness. It was that which made me ask for a note or two, rather than notice. And the Extracts used had already been set, so that I could not use yours also.
>
> You will see, that without you I could not have got on at all. What you wrote was of inexpressible value to me-- the Ex.[3] having exhausted me altogether. A thousand thanks, my dear Hunt. I think you will forgive me![4]

The notice itself-- as it appeared in the Examiner[5]--

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[1]Undated, but probably 15-17 December 1844. I am grateful to Professor K. J. Fielding for lending me a copy of this letter, which is taken from Maggs Catalogue n. 433 item 1042.

[2]Dickens had returned to Italy after a brief stay in London, during which he had read The Chimes to some of his friends-- including Hunt (Life, IV, 6, 352-3).

[3]A misreading for ER (Edinburgh Review)?

[4]Brewer, p. 249.

[5]Examiner (21 December 1844), pp. 803-5.

is still manifestly in Hunt's style, and it seems probable that Forster's "liberties" consisted chiefly of abridging Hunt's comments, in order to allow for the three columns of finely printed extracts already in type. It would be difficult to conjecture more than this, without seeing Hunt's original.[1] There is nothing in the notice itself to suggest any reason for anything but the most minor changes apart from abridgement. Certainly there was nothing in Hunt's original version to offend Dickens, as far as Forster was concerned.

However, one thing suggested by the letter, is that Forster did not usually take "great liberties" with Hunt's reviews in the Examiner, although we might well assume that there was some occasional, but minor editing by him.

As in Hunt's other notices of Dickens's fiction, this notice of The Chimes emphasises Dickens's "humanism", and because the ascription of other notices of the Christmas stories depends, in part, upon the echoing of the tone of this one, it will be helpful to quote from it here:

> CHARLES LAMB called the peal of bells which rings an old year out and a new year in, the most solemn and touching of all music, and the nighest bordering upon Heaven. There is that in the Christmas and New Year season, which, to so thoughtful a lover of humanity, seemed not less grave than glad. He did not object to the mirth, but advised reflection with it. He would have it, with all his heart, a very merry, dancing, drinking, laughing, quaffing, but not unthinking, time.
>
> So, too, Mr Dickens regards it; as his delightful Carol announced to everybody. Not as deriving its name of Christmas by mere dry etymological process of matters more divine, but as in heart and soul identical therewith, and a very portion of Christianity itself. With duties, therefore, not less generous than jovial. . . . Admonishing us to do what we can for the poor. . . .

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[1] Untraced.

> . . . If ever there was an author who deserved the name [of Christian], or intensely associated himself with Christmas thoughts, it is Mr Dickens . . . He has its life, spirits, and humour, in riotous abundance. He has its seriousness, piety, and true religion, which right reverend assailants of black gowns might envy and imitate. He has its imaginative as well as kindly thoughts, and brings the leaves and berries of the country into the very thick of town. He throws light and warmth on the coldest and squalidest places . . . In a word, Mr Dickens is one of the most abundant, mirthful, thoughtful, and ever seasonable writers, who have taught mankind the duty of diffusing their enjoyments.

A similar tone, message, and stylistic approach, is apparent in the Examiner's notice of The Cricket on the Hearth (1845),[1] as this extract illustrates:

> It is our strong belief that, in [the] largest and freest sense of benefit, very great public and private good has been done by the extraordinary popularity, the universal acceptance, of these Christmas Tales of Mr Dickens;- much positive,earnest, and practical good. For they have carried to almost every fireside, with new enjoyment of the season, a new apprehension of its claims and duties; they have mingled grave and glad thoughts with rich advantage to both; they have brought within reach of the charities what seemed too remote for them to meddle with, and what was near and familiar they have touched with a dearer domestic tenderness; they have comforted the generous, rebuked the selfish, cured not a little folly by ridicule and comic humour, and for how many of their readers may not even have revised . . . the whole manner of a life, and said, Thus you have done, but it were better thus. Mere literary fame is a second-rate thing to this.

Now, without quoting more, or drawing attention to the specific parallels of content and style that exist between this notice of The Cricket on the Hearth, and others by Hunt, it can be shown that it is most likely one in the

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[1] Examiner (27 December 1845), pp. 819-20.

series of Hunt's Christmas writings.

It is not commonly recognised today, that, in fact, Hunt, and not Dickens, was supposed chiefly responsible— in the first place— for the revival of the tradition of the Christmas spirit. Hunt had written a number of essays developing the ideas and spirit expressed in these reviews of Dickens's Christmas fiction, from as early as 1817.[1] Further, Forster, himself, later referred to Hunt as the "heartiest high priest of Christmas literature."[2] We might expect, therefore, that if Hunt were to review anything of Dickens's, it would most appropriately be his Christmas stories.

In further support of the probability that the notice of The Cricket on the Hearth is one in a series by Hunt, is the fact that the notice, in the Examiner, of A Christmas Carol,[3] (as well as that of The Chimes) is easily shown to be his also.

Apart from the style, and tone of the notice (of A Christmas Carol), which emphatically place the notice in the series, there are two clear and convenient parallel passages, which help to place it in context, and which— almost beyond doubt— establish it as Hunt's. Both occur in the second

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[1] "Christmas and Other Old National Merry-Makings Considered", Examiner (21 and 28 Dec 1817), pp. 801-3; 817-9. For a list of other essays by Hunt on Christmas, see: Leigh Hunt's Political and Occasional Essays, eds. L. H., and C. W. Houtchens (1962), p. 423.

[2] "Books for Christmas", Examiner (18 December 1847), p. 804.

[3] Examiner (23 December 1843), pp. 804-5.

paragraph, which is itself characteristic of Hunt's Christmas writings:

> There are ways of defining Christmas as Swift defined the lord mayor, the judge, and the bishop: the first, a man sitting on a great horse eating custard, which the Peter Lauries of his day did; the second, a combination of wig and ermine; and the third, a bringing together of wig and lawn. In this way, Christmas would be fourteen days of roast beef, turkey, plum pudding, mince pies, great fires, holly, and mistletoe: nor any other thing be thought essential to the picture, more than dignity to the custard eater, wisdom to the wig and ermine, or religion to the wig and lawn. But the Christmas of this Carol takes in many things beside. Its outward observances are but the type of imperative duties; failing which, the mirth and happiness will fail. Its Christmas must shine upon the cold hearth, and warm it; into the sorrowful heart, and comfort it; it must be kindness, benevolence, charity, mercy, forbearance; or its plum pudding will turn to bile, and its roast beef be indigestible.

The first part of this paragraph is unmistakably anticipated by this parallel passage from "Christmas Day" by Hunt, written thirteen years earlier:

> Swift said, that a Lord Mayor was a man sitting on a great horse, eating custard (which were the city modes in those times); and that a judge was made up of certain combinations of wig and ermine, a bishop of wig and lawn, &c. Christmas, in like manner, may be defined to be a season composed of roast-beef, plum-pudding, a great fire, holly, and a wassail-bowl.[1]

Furthermore, the last sentence (of the quoted passage from the notice of a Christmas Carol) can be seen to look forward to a series of thoughts in Hunt's notice of The Chimes (see above), the following year. Hunt wrote of

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[1] Leigh Hunt, "Christmas Day", Tatler (25 December 1830), pp. 386. Also in full in Leigh Hunt's Political and Occasional Essays, p. 257. There are a great many parallels between this essay and Hunt's "Christmas" notices in the Examiner.

The Chimes that it inspires "its reader with good and merciful thoughts; with forbearance as well as benevolence; [and] with desires conservative of all precious and kindly usage."[1]

Now, it appears very likely that Hunt wrote a number of other notices of Dickens's fiction. Once again, though, in the interests of space and readability, the remaining evidences for the ascriptions which are now made to him, are listed in note form in Appendix D.

## VII

Henry Morley,[2] probably the last major reviewer of the works of Dickens in the Examiner, started writing for the journal in 1849, and by the close of 1850 was earning a guinea a week for his theatrical and literary reviewing.[3] From 1856, as subeditor, he became responsible for all the dramatic and literary reviewing,[4] and it even seems likely--from his correspondence --that he had been doing most of the literary reviewing for some time before then.[5] Certainly

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[1] Examiner (21 December 1844), p. 803.

[2] Henry Morley (1822-94; DNB), began his series (in the Examiner), "How to Make the Home Healthy," in June, 1849. He continued to contribute leaders, and theatrical and literary reviews after the series ended. In 1851, he also joined the salaried staff of Household Words, to which he contributed (over the years) more than 250 articles. He became the subeditor of the Examiner from 1856, and became its editor from January 1861 to November 1867. After the last issue of Household Words, he continued on the staff of All the Year Round.

[3] H. S. Solly, The Life of Henry Morley (1898), p. 159.

[4] Ibid., p. 226.

[5] Ibid., pp. 190, 203, 206, 221, 226.

he had been writing the theatrical column regularly from 1851.[1]

Now Professor Philip Collins has recently argued that the bulk of the Examiner's notices, of the works of Dickens, were written by Forster. He reasons from the chief assumption that since Forster used them in compiling his Life, they must be his.[2] However, as it will be pointed out in more detail below,[3] Forster did not hesitate to use notices written by others in the Examiner in compiling the Life. This is no less true of those notices written in the Examiner after he left the staff in 1855.

For, even waiving the likelihood that Forster did not write most of the major notices of Dickens's fiction before 1855, an independent consideration of these later notices suggests they were more probably written by Morley, than by Forster.

Firstly-- and this must be taken largely on trust from one who has been closely absorbed with the files of the Examiner for over four years --the style of these post-1855 notices is not convincingly that of Forster's. Stylistically, most noticeably in their academic, but facile expression, they seem to identify more closely with those of Henry Morley-- then responsible anyway for the literary reviewing in the journal.

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[1]Henry Morley, The Journal of a London Playgoer from 1851 to 1866 (1866), pp. 10-11.

[2]Philip Collins, "Dickens' Self-Estimate: Some New Evidence", Dickens the Craftsman: Strategies of Presentation, ed. Robert B. Partlow, Jr. (Illinois, 1970), pp. 21-43.

[3]See below, Chapter 7.

More emphatic, however, for those unable to make the stylistic comparison for themselves, is the evidence suggested by the notices's "insistence upon the formal unity of Dickens' later novels."[1] Now it so happens that it was more characteristic of Morley, than of Forster, to express such an insistence. Further, the way in which the reviewer in the Examiner sees the unity of Dickens's later novels as crystallizations "of thought about some one central idea,"[2] is precisely the way that Morley viewed the form of a novel (or play).

Elsewhere, in his writings, he insists that a dramatist "or novelist . . . should base his tale upon some simple and essential truth of life."[3] In another place he also writes that the "point of view in every play of Shakespeare's is some strength or weakness of our common humanity that lies at the heart of life," and that in King John, "a source of strength . . . is the harmony produced by a clear reference of all its parts to the point of view from which the whole picture is taken."[4]

But perhaps one of the more convincing parallels to the discussion of unity and its relevance (in the Examiner's notice of Our Mutual Friend), occurred in the theatrical columns of the journal just two month's previously.[5] Morley

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[1]Collins, p. 33.

[2]Examiner (28 October 1865), p. 681. A review of Our Mutual Friend.

[3]Henry Morley, Of English Literature in the Reign of Victoria with a Glance at the Past (Leipzig, 1881), p. 379.

[4]Henry Morley, English Writers: An Attempt towards a History of English Literature, 11 vols. (1887), X, 153.

[5]Examiner (19 August 1865), p. 525.

quotes his notice of a performance of Tom Taylor's The Serf (1865), in his Journal of a London Playgoer. In referring to the play itself, he writes: "It is a thoroughly interesting play, having that essential unity which all good English dramatists observe . . . that is to say, it has one central idea, that is its soul; an idea in this case, with the strongest hold upon the feelings of an English audience. . . ."[1]

Logically, Professor Collins rightly questions the literalness of Charles Kent's statement, in the Dictionary of National Biography, that Forster "never afterwards wrote a line" for the Examiner after resigning from the editorship. He also suggests, logically— on the face of it —as another evidence for arguing Forster's authorship of these later notices of Dickens's novels, that "it would be a foolish editor who failed to retain so well-qualified a reviewer of the leading novelist of the day, especially as the job would still be done anonymously."[2] But it is perhaps significant that Kent had obtained his information for the DNB entry on Forster at secondhand from Henry Morley's own biographical sketch of Forster. Nobody should have known better than the new editor of the Examiner, that Forster "never wrote another line" in the journal after 1855.[3] Moreover, if

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[1]Morley, p. 375. See also, pp. 142 and 244 for other parallels.

[2]Collins, p. 30.

[3]Henry Morley, "A Biographical Sketch of Mr. Forster", The Dyce and Forster Collections, Handbook (1880), p. 69. Cited by Charles Kent as one of the "two principal sources of information" for his DNB entry.

Morley can be said to have any characteristic quality, it is that of being precise. Yet, even if we choose not to take his very specific remark literally, there could not have been many critics better suited for reviewing Dickens's later works than Morley himself-- a writer close to the novelist during this period, and one greatly influenced by him in his own writing.

Further, it does not seem likely that Forster would have volunteered or agreed to review Dickens's later novels, when-- as suggested by the Life --his own enthusiasm for them was to a degree blunted.[1] Indeed, it seems reasonable to suppose that if he allowed Morley to review works by such close friends as Carlyle, Landor, Dyce, and Bulwer-Lytton,[2] while he was still the general editor, he would surely also have trusted the enthusiastic and discriminating Morley (who was after all then the editor) to notice these novels of Dickens. There seems to be no reason why Forster should have interfered with the new editor's reviewing-- even if he had been able to.

Now, if we assume that Morley did indeed write most of the notices of the works of Dickens, at least after 1855, there might still be a temptation to project him in the place of Forster as a reviewer, who, as Professor Collins suggests, reflected in these later notices "what Dickens valued in his work. . . ."[3] But even if this were true of Morley's

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[1]See also above, pp. 154-5.

[2]See, Solly, pp. 206, 237, 243, and Morley, The Journal of a London Playgoer, p. 359.

[3]Collins, p. 41.

reviews, it would be difficult to prove, since it so happens that he seems to have been consistently concerned about the unity of a work of art, therefore it is unlikely that he was consciously reflecting Dickens's view. A glance through the literary columns of the Examiner after 1855 will confirm this. What is praised in these late notices of Dickens's novels, is just about what Morley might have been expected to praise regardless of his own relationship to Dickens.

Besides, to suppose, as Professor Collins suggests, that Forster was likely to have written "what Dickens wanted to read rather than what Forster entirely thought,"[1] is to seem to imply that he was almost as big a "Fuzboz" as Lady Lytton portrayed him to be.[2] Whereas in actual fact, Forster can be seen-- in the Examiner --time and time again, speaking his mind openly and critically in considering the works of many of his closest friends, and at a time too when he claimed full responsibility for the reviews.[3] Thus, Forster in private life, and in his reviewing did not usually hesitate to speak his mind where he thought his comments were likely to be constructive. We know that this is also true in his working relationship with Dickens as a novelist. To assume otherwise, is to do Forster an injustice.

In summary, it is apparent that if indeed Forster did

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[1]Collins, p. 39.

[2]Lady Lytton Bulwer, Cheveley; or The Man of Honour, 2 vols. (New York, 1839), II, 118-9.

[3]See, for example: Examiner (11 March 1843), pp. 148-9; (18 May 1834), p. 308; (17 January 1841), pp. 35-7; (3 November 1839), pp. 691-3.

not write many of the earlier notices he used in compiling the critical accounts in the Life, then we cannot ascribe these later notices to him simply because passages from them also parallel passages in the Life. All this is made more clear in my next chapter. In fact, as I will explain, in the next section, it turns out that there were a number of logical reasons why Forster should not have written them, and a number of reasons why Morley should have. Moreover, evidences of style and point of view, support the probability that Henry Morley was the author of most of the notices of Dickens's fiction written in the Examiner after 1855.

It is unfortunately more difficult to ascribe the authorship of the reviews written between 1850 and 1855 to anyone definitely, since they are usually quite brief, and in view of content and style, they could have been written by either Morley or Forster, or even by someone else.[1]

* * *

A great many thoughts arise on the realisation that we have here an almost entirely new state of things in relation to Forster, Dickens, Hunt, and Morley, and in relation to the Examiner and the Life. But perhaps the most insistent, and obvious, is the thought that for nearly a hundred years, successive generations of Dickensians have held erroneous views about Forster as a reviewer of Dickens, about the relationship between Dickens and Hunt, and about the nature of the Life, and that these views came about because of a false assumption that until Professor Collins's pioneer

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[1] See below, p. 270.

essay,[1] no one seriously examined.

The moral to be drawn is obvious and it is sincerely hoped that nothing will be taken at face value in this further attempt to ascribe the notices in the Examiner. There are, indeed, strong grounds for my ascriptions in many cases, but in others there is room for further consideration. Undoubtedly the list of ascriptions in Appendix D will be amended from time to time, by myself and others. However, I feel that it is unlikely that any amendments will be substantial enough to affect materially the burden of the conclusions that we can now draw.

## VIII

The first question to be raised, is an obvious one. Why, when Forster might seem to be so much the obvious and appropriate critic of Dickens from 1836 to 1855, did he so regularly hand over the assignment to others? There are probably, in fact, a number of perfectly sound reasons why he should have done so.

Firstly, although not necessarily the chief reason, it is possible that he was unwilling to risk jeopardising his friendship with Dickens, even for a short time, by an unfavourable notice, or even by a chance comment in a notice that might offend. Forster mentions in the Life that "Dickens felt criticism, of whatever kind, with too sharp a relish for the indifference he assumed to it."[2] He adds

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[1] Op. Cit.

[2] Life, IX, 8, 312.

that Dickens "believed himself to be entitled to higher tribute than he was always in the habit of receiving." Now Forster had also experienced a similar reaction from Leigh Hunt,[1] and he knew how hard it was to review the work of a close and artistically sensitive friend without giving offence.

Secondly, there is the possibility that Forster handed over the responsibility of reviewing Dickens's fiction to others because both he and Dickens desired a friendly, but objective public criticism-- something that would always tend to be suspect coming from a close friend.

Perhaps supporting this possibility is the fact that Forster seems to have refrained from writing the major notices of Dickens's fiction at about the same time that he became more closely involved with his novels before publication. Forster comments in the Life that from October 1837, there "was nothing written" by Dickens "after this date which I did not see before the world did."[2] It may not be mere coincidence that from that time onwards, there are no major reviews in the Examiner that can be convincingly argued to have been written by Forster.

At the same time, Forster's close and idolatrous friendship with Dickens was well known. For example, a lampoon

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[1] J. A. Davies (in "Leigh Hunt and John Forster") illustrates Forster's difficulty in pleasing Hunt with his reviews. One of the unpublished letters Davies quotes, refers to a review Forster had written: "The notice of the Examiner was poor but well meant. Indeed Hunt when I sit down to say anything of you, a great many feelings which ought to make what I say the best in the world, are apt to make it, in expression at least, the worst."

[2] Life, II, 1, 71. See also, Letters (P), I, 318, n.4.

appearing in The Man in the Moon (a rival to Punch), shortly after the fifth number of Dombey and Son, diagrams an imaginary funeral cortege of Paul Dombey. Part of it suggests not only Forster's stoutness, and his Podsnapian public manner, but notes also what was supposed to be his (and the Examiner's) unrestrained patronage of Dickens:

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| | THE AUTHOR<br>Supported by<br>Bradbury and Evans | |
| Members of the Examiner Clique | The Celebrated and Talented<br>JOHN FORSTER, Esq.,<br>Bearing the Author's Hatband,<br>And kept up by<br>Two Able-bodied Porters[1] | Members of the Examiner Clique |

In addition to their well-known friendship, it must also have been common knowledge among literary circles that Forster was also closely affiliated as reader and adviser with Dickens's chief publishers, Chapman and Hall. Thus, for the sake of appearance alone, if not also on genuine ethical grounds, it was probably expedient to ask another to write the notices. Of course, Forster was still held responsible for what was said within the literary columns of the journal, but he could at least deny, in all honesty, that he used his position directly to "puff" the works of a close friend and business investment. That he did not take a similar measure in the cases of Lytton or Mrs. Gaskell may be partly explained by the fact that he did not usually work as closely with them as he did with Dickens, nor was he known to be as intimate a friend.

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[1]Unsigned, "Inquest on the Late Master Paul Dombey", The Man in the Moon (March 1847), i, 155-60. Reprinted in Dickens: the Critical Heritage, p. 223.

Forster's reviewing of The Chimes (1845), seems to support all this.[1] No doubt he had felt free to review The Chimes in the Edinburgh Review, because, in the first place, as in the Examiner, its articles were usually unsigned, and secondly, in the event of his authorship being found out, Forster could always argue, with some justification, that in this instance he could be a demonstrably objective critic: The Chimes had been written (as must have been well known) away from him, while Dickens was in Italy. Furthermore, it was published by Bradbury and Evans, with whom Forster had no direct business relationship, as he then had with Chapman and Hall.

Although in a way, it may be arguing at cross-purposes with what I have just said about Forster being unwilling to risk offending the critically sensitive Dickens, it is worth suggesting that since Forster had contributed a review in another journal than his own, in this instance, there may be others elsewhere-- contributed anonymously for the reasons of expedience that we have just mentioned. In any event, it would be unlikely that he would have reviewed Dickens's later works anywhere, since, as the Life makes clear, he was not nearly so enthusiastic about them as he had been with the earlier works.

In the case of the Examiner, however, Forster had readily to hand a most appropriate critic to review Dickens's fiction, throughout the earlier years. Hunt not only had

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[1] John Forster, "The Chimes . . ." Edinburgh Review, LXXXL (January 1845), pp. 181-9.

close ties with the journal anyway[1] but also genuinely understood what Dickens was then trying to achieve in his fiction. He genuinely admired his fiction, and identified closely with his point of view. Besides, Hunt was a much older man, and at first a relative stranger, and perhaps could criticise more directly without being so likely to give offence. Lastly, he was a critic that Forster could trust, since, although I feel that Davies exaggerates,[2] it is clear that Hunt had a large part in the shaping of Forster's view of literature. At any rate, it appears that Hunt was usually glad to review Dickens's fiction, and that Dickens, himself, was glad to read his criticisms, at that stage.

## IX

This last point about Dickens being glad to read Hunt's criticisms is important, since it seems to confirm Forster's belief that Dickens was relatively indifferent to "praise of his performance on the purely literary side, compared with the higher recognition of them as bits of actual life, with the meaning and purpose on their part, and the responsibility on his. . . ."[3] As I have already pointed out, this is essentially what Hunt (as well as Forster) praises in all his newly identified notices of Dickens's fiction.

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[1]It is well known that Hunt had been the co-founder of the journal, but little is known about the extent of his contributions between 1833 to his death in 1859. As Forster's correspondence with him shows, he was certainly reviewing fairly frequently during Forster's editorship of the literary and theatrical columns. See, Brewer, pp. 239-53.

[2]James Atterbury Davies, "Leigh Hunt and John Forster", Review of English Studies, N.S. XIX, No. 73 (1968), pp. 25-40.

[3]Life, II, 1, 70. See also above, pp. 188-9.

Suggesting, among other things, that this view of Dickens's self-estimate of himself as a writer remained consistent until at least 1865, is the mystery surrounding the disposition of the manuscript of Our Mutual Friend (1865):

Briefly, it is that although by his will, Dickens left Forster "such manuscripts of my published works as may be in my possession at the time of decease,"[1] the manuscript of Our Mutual Friend was not among them. Now, Forster was one of Dickens's executors. It is likely that he knew the terms of the will which was signed on 12 May 1869. But it came entirely as a surprise to him to discover that the manuscript of Our Mutual Friend was not among those which were in Dickens's possession at the time of his death.[2] Perhaps it hardly needs to be explained that the only other major exception, which was deliberately given to someone other than Forster, was the manuscript of Great Expectations.[3]

As far as one can reconstruct what happened, Dickens gave the manuscript of Our Mutual Friend to E. S. Dallas,[4]

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[1]Will, as at the end of the Life.

[2]A transcript of a letter (made by Professor K. J. Fielding, and kindly loaned to me by him) from Georgina Hogarth to Frederic Ouvry-- 24 July 1870 --mentions that she had been reminded of the MS. by Charles Collins, and that Forster would probably think that its absence could only be accounted for by, at best, "a theft, I fear," and that this would therefore "prevent its being restored to his possession."

[3]Given to Chauncey Hare Townshend, to whom the book was dedicated. This does not seem to have been a surprise to Forster in June 1870, though it may have some significance in considering Dickens's relations with Forster. But if he did not know of the gift when it was made (1861) he would have been likely to have learned of it at the time of Townshend's death, in 1868, when he bequeathed his collection of manuscripts to the Wisbech Literary Institute.

[4]E. S. Dallas (1828-79; DBN), journalist and author.

and did so mainly as a consequence of the favourable review that Dallas had written of the novel for the Times.[1] Professor K. J. Fielding has already pointed out,[2] that though the review is favourable, it is not exceptionally so; in fact, in many ways it is adversely critical, surprising though this may seem:

> . . . this last novel of Mr. Charles Dickens . . . labours under the disadvantages of a beginning that drags. . . . the reader was more perplexed than pleased. There was an appearance of great effort without corresponding result. We were introduced to a set of people in whom it is impossible to take an interest. . . .
>
> That Our Mutual Friend has defects we not only allow, but shall ruthlessly point out. The weak part of the work is to be found in what may be called "The Social Chorus." . . . Now, the idea . . . is a great one, but it has not been worked out with details of sufficient interest.
>
> . . . In the first place, a reader likes the story to go on, and does not like to be interrupted as he follows the plot by the talk and the movements of people who have no distinct connexion or but a quasi-connexion with its incidents. As if that of itself were not a sufficient difficulty to be overcome, the novelist has this further difficulty in store: he has to make us care to read about people who are remarkable only for their nothingness. . . .
>
> . . . People read superficially and hurriedly nowadays-- do not, indeed, read books, but skim them; and they may easily carry away this first impression that Our Mutual Friend cannot be a good novel, because it is chiefly to do with people in whom it is impossible to feel any interest.

Yet, elsewhere in the review, Dallas writes:

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[1] The Times (29 November 1865), p. 6. Also in, The Critical Heritage, pp. 464-8.

[2] K. J. Fielding, Charles Dickens: a Critical Introduction (1965), pp. 228-9.

> . . . we say deliberately that we have read nothing of Mr. Dickens's which has given us a higher idea of his power than this last tale. . . . here he is in greater force than ever, astonishing us with a fertility in which we can trace no signs of repetition.
> . . . In all these 600 pages there is not a careless line. There are lines and pages we object to as wrong in execution, or not quite happy in idea; but there is not a page nor a line which is not the product of a full mind bursting with what it has to say, and determined to say it well. Right or wrong, the work is always thoroughgoing and conscientious. . . . Mr. Dickens cannot write a tale without in some way bringing it to bear upon a social grievance, with regard to which he has a strong feeling. He has a strong feeling as to the manner in which the Poor Law is administered in this country, and he devotes one of his most powerful chapters to showing with what horror poor Betty Higden shrinks from parochial charity.

It would not be unfair to say (after a reading of the complete review), that what the critic praises most highly is the intensity and detail-- the fact that in six hundred pages there is not "a careless line."

Just why Dickens presented the manuscript to Dallas is a little obscure, but that it was in return for this review and others, and that perhaps he owed him other obligations, seems clear.[1] We must be careful what inferences we draw; but it was an extraordinarily generous gift, and perhaps it could be argued that it went to a critic who (unlike the reviewer of his later novels in the Examiner) was actually chary of praising Dickens's construction and care for unity, and one who like Hunt preferred to single out such qualities as the naturalness of his characters, and his concern for social wrongs. One thing is disturbingly clear: we do

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[1] Letters (N), (to be added

not know where the manuscript of Edwin Drood would have gone, but the manuscripts of the two previous complete novels were deliberately given to other men than Forster.

There is little doubt that Forster was pained and hurt by the "loss" of the manuscript of Our Mutual Friend, and that Dickens must have known the value that he set on being their custodian.[1]

Nothing can be argued with any certainty from all this. Yet, we may make some inferences that seem to support what we already know or suspect. Briefly, it suggests that Forster was not on the closest terms with Dickens during the 1860's. More significantly, it also seems to confirm that Dickens's self-estimate of his fiction remained generally consistent from the time of Forster's notices of Pickwick (1837), through Hunt's notices in the thirties and forties, and up to Dallas's notice in the Times (1865). Finally, because of the foregoing, it appears unlikely that Dickens's displeasure with Hunt (that lead to Skimpole) stemmed from Hunt's notices of his work in the Examiner.[2]

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[1]I am very grateful to Professor K. J. Fielding for allowing me to use some of his notes in relation to the Dallas review.

[2]Hunt was shocked and deeply hurt by Dickens's usage of him in Bleak House (1853). He wrote: "I had spoken, and written, nothing but good and kind of him, publicly or in private, contributing what I could to his stock of glory and honour . . . ." (B.M. Add. MS38542).

It is also worth pointing out that what Hunt says here, might be seen to reflect back to his notices in the Examiner, since he is not known to have reviewed Dickens regularly elsewhere.

In conclusion, it is obvious that in the light of the new ascriptions to the notices of Dickens's fiction, in the Examiner, a complete reassessment of Forster as a critic of Dickens is called for.

The next chapter (with Appendices E and F) attempts to illustrate briefly just how Forster compiled the critical sections in the Life, to consider the extent to which he used the notices from the Examiner, to suggest how his critical compilations there may best be seen, and finally, it attempts to draw some conclusions about how we can now see Forster as a critic of Dickens.

# CHAPTER 7

## THE COMPILATION OF FORSTER'S CRITICAL COMMENTS IN HIS "LIFE OF CHARLES DICKENS"

### I

It must be emphasised that this is not meant to be a full study of the compilation of Forster's critical comments in his Life of Charles Dickens. Indeed, a comprehensive study of the subject would necessitate a consideration on the scale of another thesis altogether. Yet, even on this limited scale it is possible to arrive at some worthwhile conclusions about the relationship of the Examiner to the Life, and about Forster as a critic of Dickens.

Forster's method seems to have been relatively straightforward. Before he began writing, he had a complete file of the notices of Dickens's works from the Examiner in front of him;[1] for, from an examination of the Life, it is clear that he referred to these notices, dating from 1836 right up to 1870. He also had in front of him a large number of letters to which he occasionally referred, as well as some miscellaneous critical essays, such as those by Taine, Lewes, and Ruskin.[2] The major concern, however, in this

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[1] He is unlikely to have used his set of the Examiner now in the Forster Collection, since that set is surprisingly clean inside, even on those pages that he would have referred to, and which would have been expected to have shown some slight trace of use.

[2] For example: H. Taine, "Charles Dickens: his Talent and his Works", The History of English Literature, trans. H. Van Laun (Edinburgh, 1871), IV, 115-64; G. H. Lewes, "Forster's Life of Charles Dickens", Fortnightly Review (February 1872), XVII, 141-54; John Ruskin, "Unto this Last", Cornhill Magazine (August 1860), II, 159. All of these are reprinted in The Critical Heritage.

study of the compilation of his critical comments, is with the way in which he used the notices from the Examiner.

There were obvious advantages for Forster in using these notices throughout the Life. Firstly, he was no doubt familiar with most of them; secondly, since they appeared in a politically, fairly consistent journal and reflected its biases, it was easier to see them as a complete body of criticism than if he had compiled a dossier or scrapbook of miscellaneous criticism; thirdly, they were apparently ready to hand-- an important consideration for a sick man, as Forster then was; and finally, there was one major advantage-- an advantage that may be seen to justify his extensive use of them, in critical terms. Forster, himself, gives us a clue to this advantage, when he comments that his "present notices" of Pickwick and Nickleby (in the Life) were "biographical rather than critical."[1]

Forster's use of the notices from the Examiner lent itself particularly well to his "biographical" intention, not only in the instances of his accounts of Pickwick and Nickleby in the Life, but also in his critical accounts of most of the other works of Dickens. For, by referring to the notices from the Examiner, he was able to reconstruct concisely what appears (after a cursory consideration) to be a fairly representative account of the contemporary critical reception of each of Dickens's works as it appeared.[2]

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[1] Life, II, 4, 98.

[2] With, perhaps, the exception of the later reviews by Morley (or another).

His use of the notices from the Examiner, moreover, was particularly appropriate in another biographical sense, since they were written by men who were also a part of Dickens's circle of friendship and influence. Thus, there was not only a sense of coherence about the notices as a collection, but also a feeling-- from Forster's point of view, at least --that they were actually a part of Dickens's biography, especially since they (the early ones particularly) must often have arisen out of discussion with Dickens himself, as well as having been discussed with him after their publication in the journal.

Forster reinforces the biographical intention of his critical comments time and time again in the Life, and it is important to take this into consideration when evaluating him as a critic of Dickens, with reference to the Life. Perhaps the most noticeable way that he reinforces his purpose is in the way that he opens his critical commentary on each novel:

Sketches by Boz

> I remember still with what hearty praise the book was first named to me by my dear friend Albany Fonblanque. . . .[1]

Pickwick Papers

> Of what the reception of the book had been up to this time, and of the popularity Dickens had won as its author, this also will be the proper place to speak.[2]

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[1] Life, I, 5, 60.

[2] Ibid., II, 1, 72.

Oliver Twist

> The completed Oliver Twist found a circle of admirers, not so wide in its range as those of others of his books. . . .[1]

Nicholas Nickleby

> I well recollect the doubt there was, mixed with the eager expectation which the announcement of his second serial story had awakened. . . .[2]

Old Curiosity Shop

> The published book was an extraordinary success. . . . but opinion at home continued still to turn on the old characteristics. . . .[3]

He continues with the same emphasis throughout the book: opening his comments with a recollection of the reception of a work of Dickens by himself or others, and then continuing with critical comments largely compiled (except in the last volume of the Life) with relatively unchanged extracts from the contemporary notices in the Examiner. The resulting sense of contemporaneousness in his critical remarks in the Life is further heightened by his frequent use of letters contemporary with the work under consideration, as well as by a contrast with his occasional and pointed references to much later reviews by Taine and Lewes, for example.[4] All this, plus the fact that his "critiques" are in any case

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[1] Ibid., II, 3, 89.

[2] Ibid., II, 4, 95.

[3] Ibid., II, 7, 123.

[4] Op. Cit.

embedded in a biographical narrative, surely leaves little doubt about his chief intention in using the notices from the Examiner. Certainly his use of them cannot just be put down to convenience, illness, or laziness.

Since a detailed consideration of exactly how Forster used all the notices from the Examiner in the Life is outside the scope of this chapter, perhaps it will be suitable to examine more closely those of Oliver Twist and Nicholas Nickleby.[1]

These two accounts are particularly suitable for a closer consideration, firstly, because they are longer than most of the others; secondly, because they involved the fairly extensive use of a number of notices from the Examiner; and finally, because both accounts include extracts from notices written by other men than Forster. A limitation in viewing them as representative accounts, however, is that some of the conclusions that we can draw from looking at them apply more to the critiques in the Life written up to the account of Bleak House,[2] than to those, after this part. For, it is already clear— from a cursory examination of the later (and briefer) accounts —that Forster later used the notices from the Examiner very sparingly, and with more caution, than he did when preparing the earlier critiques. This is perhaps predictable in view of what I have said previously about Forster's lessening enthusiasm for Dickens's later works,[3]

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[1] Life, II, 2, 83 to 3, 92, and II, 4, 95-9.

[2] Life, VII, 1, 113-9.

[3] See above, pp.

since he is unlikely to have shared fully in the enthusiasm of Morley's notices of them in the Examiner. But there may be other explanations which I shall touch on presently.[1]

In any event, the two accounts of Oliver Twist and Nicholas Nickleby are typical of most of the critical notices throughout the Life, in that they are largely composed of extracts from reviews already published and of passages from Dickens's correspondence. This can be seen very graphically (in the instances of Oliver and Nicholas) in Appendix F, below, where the parts, of each account, that Forster "borrowed" are typed in red. The proportion of his borrowings here, is fairly representative of most of his critiques in the Life, with the proviso that in all the critiques after Bleak House, he draws more heavily upon other sources (essays and letters) than from the notices in the Examiner.

A reading and comparison of the two accounts and their sources as set out in Appendix F, leaves one with the impression that an excellent job of editing has been carried out--something, furthermore, that goes beyond a paste-and-scissors' compilation. On the whole, in both accounts, he has dexterously dovetailed his source material, trimmed and polished it, and yet, in general, in each case, still retained its essential tone and meaning in its new context.[2]

As far as the style of the Life as a whole is concerned, Professor S. Monod observes, wrongly I feel, that "Forster

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[1]See below, p. 227.

[2]But some of Hunt's remarks about Nicholas Nickleby are used in the Life account to refer to Oliver Twist (see the opening paragraph of the transcribed Life account of Oliver Twist).

was not style-conscious," and that he had "no desire . . . to refine the expression of his thought."[1] For even the critical commentary of the Life does have a definite, though often ponderous style, and even though so much of it was not directly written by Forster, his editorial rewriting results in an almost indefinable sense of single authorship throughout. This final synthesis, in fact, really does represent something of an editorial and literary achievement, in its stylistic unity and relative smoothness.

After making comparisons between the critical commentary in the Life and its sources, it might well be thought that had Forster intended primarily to record his own opinions about Dickens's fiction, it would have been much easier for him to have written his critical comments anew, perhaps after having first refreshed his memory of the books from the notices in the Examiner and elsewhere. Yet it is also open to doubt how much he re-read Dickens's novels before writing about them.

Fuller proofs of his approach will not be available until a detailed study of the Life is carried out along roughly the same lines as this chapter; nevertheless, as previously suggested above, it already seems possible that Forster's use of the notices from the Examiner, and his generous use of other essays and letters, stems in part from the fact that to a great extent, he was trying to project himself (in the critical sections) as representative of the contemporary critical response to each of Dickens's works as

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[1] S. Monod, "John Forster's 'Life of Dickens' and Literary Criticism", English Studies Today, 4th Series (Rome, 1966), p. 368.

it came out (a sort of critical persona, in fact). This would suggest another reason why he did not use the later notices (by Morley, or another) in the Examiner, since in Forster's view, they were probably not typical of the contemporary reaction to Dickens's later works, which was so often based on a wish for a return to his earlier manner.

My suggestion that Forster had a biographical intention in the way that he used the notices from the Examiner, is a constructive way of viewing what can be seen today as "plagiarisms" of others' work. Yet he is still reprehensible, in that nowhere does he give any indication that he was using their material in the Life. For example, the accounts of both Oliver Twist and Nicholas Nickleby are largely compiled from notices by Hunt; in the instance of the close in the account in the Life of Oliver Twist, Forster uses another notice that may even have been written by Dickens himself (see Appendix C). Yet nowhere are these debts even hinted at by Forster.

On the other hand, the most ungenerous way of viewing Forster's "plagiarisms", is to see him as a blatant plagiarist. From this point of view, one could argue that the reason that Forster did not use the later notices in the Examiner, was possibly because unlike Hunt and Fonblanque, Morley was still alive, and thus could object to the free use of his own notices, written, furthermore, at a time when Forster had no connection with the journal. One could also find precedents and point to Forster's over-generous reliance on Prior's Life of Oliver Goldsmith (1837)[1] in his

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[1] James Prior, The Life of Oliver Goldsmith, M.B., 2 vols. (1837).

own Life and Adventures of Oliver Goldsmith (1848).[1] Prior objected at the time, and Forster felt obliged to preface all subsequent editions with a rejoinder. In this preface, Forster dismisses the notion of plagiarism with which he was never specifically charged, and denies that he was unethical in using the biographical and historical facts that Prior had discovered in his researches, and included in his book. Forster writes, in his preface: "No man can hold a patent in biography or history except by a mastery of execution unapproached by competitors."[2] He goes on, later in the preface, to say that the "reader who examines both [biographies] will probably admit that two so unlike each other have seldom been produced on the same theme."[3] But the truth is, that from a modern standpoint Forster used Prior's facts in a ruthless and unashamed way, giving him credit for them only in passing, and then often discrediting his scholarship. It is also manifestly clear to anyone caring to make a comparison, that in fact Forster wrote his own Life and Adventures of Oliver Goldsmith by closely following Prior's version from page to page! Again, a more detailed study will be needed to show to precisely what extent Forster is answerable to a charge of plagiarism or unethical practice. Washington Irving certainly recognised (but without recrimination) that Forster had been "availing himself of the labours

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[1]John Forster, The Life and Adventures of Oliver Goldsmith, (1848).

[2]John Forster, The Life and Times of Oliver Goldsmith, 2 vols. (1871), I, viii.

[3]Ibid., I, ix.

of the indefatigable Prior."[1]

Ironically, it turns out that in his biographies of Dickens and Goldsmith, Forster seems to have put his own reputation at risk, for the chief purpose of raising the reputations of the men he was writing about. Yet, it is important to put his behaviour into context.

In the first place, Forster had learned the business of journalism at a time when there was little delicacy over matters of copyright. The greater part of the Examiner itself, for example, was obviously compiled with scissors and paste. Only the leaders and critical sections could really be said to have originated with the journal itself. The same applies to most of the other journals with which Forster had been connected, to a greater or less extent. The last journal he was associated with-- The Household Narrative --was almost totally put together in this way.[2]

This aspect of journalistic mentality, might well have carried on over to his own writing outside the Examiner. No doubt, his histories, as well as his biographies, also show signs of having been compiled in part from the work of others who had more time than a busy editor, and man of letters, to do original research.

Also, it is possible that editors, in Forster's day, considered work published anonymously in their own journal (or columns) as partly their own, or common property, because they usually accepted the full liability for them. Also

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[1]Washington Irving, Oliver Goldsmith: a Biography (1850), p.v.

[2]See below, Appendix B.

justifying their sense of possession, is the way that leaders and reviews were often contributed jointly, and were nearly always "doctored" by the editor himself. After a period of time, in the absence of any record, it would often have been difficult to sort out exactly who wrote what. Unfortunately, in the case of Forster's borrowings, Hunt's hand is usually far too obvious to allow for an easy excuse in this respect.

Nineteenth-century editorial practice is once again part of a larger study; yet I think that it would be fair to generalise that a really professional code of ethics about journalistic authorship had not been developed during Forster's time. Perhaps it is only in these days of the fairly sophisticated professionalism of Letters that a more precise code of ethics has evolved. Certainly Forster could not have got away so easily with his "borrowings" had he written his biographies of Dickens and Goldsmith today. As it is, if there is now the temptation to discredit Forster and his Life of Dickens, these things should be borne in mind.

Yet there is another way of seeing Forster's free-handed approach. In his recent book, Professor R. Hart talks about a "Romantic theory" of biography which was the inspiration for the great biographies of Boswell and Lockhart.[1]

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[1]Francis R. Hart, Lockhart as Romantic Biographer (Edinburgh, 1971). This is an important study to read in connection with any extended consideration of Forster's Life (or any of his biographies). Regrettably, it comes from the press too late for me to make more than a brief reference to it in the way that Professor Hart's findings can be seen to reflect on Forster's own treatment of his material.

In fact, at this point, it would probably be quite safe to place Forster's major biographies in this tradition. For, without going into detail, it is clear that like Lockhart and Boswell, Forster did not just write Dickens's biography without thought; as a reviewer, biographer, and critic, he had theories of biography which he shared with others, and that although their theory may have been invoked to excuse the way in which they borrowed and manipulated material, there was a Romantic theory of biography.

Seen in this way, Forster may be thought of as treating a chronological selection of reviews (taken for convenience and consistency from the Examiner) as if they were biographical materials of the kind that Boswell and Lockhart used, and which Professor Hart shows us, they regarded as properly subject to their "manipulation".

An essential question remaining therefore, is how all of this should affect our attitude towards the Life and its author. Clearly, once more, this is a question that can only be fully answered after a more detailed study has been completed. Yet, as far as it has gone, there are a number of general observations worth making.

Firstly, it is important to realise Forster's proper biographical purpose (apparently based on the "Romantic theory" of biography) in compiling the critical commentary in the way that he did. Secondly, it is important to take into account the journalistic background of its author-- which was touched on above. Finally, it is essential to recognise that regardless of-- or perhaps because of -- Forster's free-handed methods with his materials, the Life

still remains probably the closest that we can get to Dickens, outside his own writings. For, it should be becoming clear now, that Forster took great pains to create what he saw as the true picture of Dickens, and of the contemporary reception of his works. His tampering with the notices from the Examiner, and with the letters[1] he quotes, may yet be seen to result in an essentially truer picture than any that we can easily construct from this distance in time. Carlyle, who had been closer to Dickens than most, recognised the truthfulness of Forster's delineation, and ranked it with Boswell's Life of Johnson. He wrote to Forster (16 February 1874):

> I incline to consider this Biography as taking rank, in essential respects, parallel to Boswell himself. . . . by . . . those sparkling, clear and sunny utterances of Dickens's own (bits of auto-biography unrivalled in clearness and credibility) which were at your disposal and have been intercalated every now and then, you have given to every intelligent eye the power of looking down to the very bottom of Dickens's mode of existing in this world; and I say have performed a feat which, except in Boswell, the unique, I know not where to parallel. So long as Dickens is interesting to his fellow-men, here will be seen, face to face, what Dickens's manner of existing was; his steady practicality, withal; the singularly solid business talent he continually had; and deeper than all, if one had the eye to see deep enough, dark, fateful silent elements, tragical to look upon, and hiding amid dazzling radiances as of the sun, the elements of death itself.[2]

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[1]Both the editors of the Letters (P), I, xii, and Davies, in his thesis (pp. 450-6 and 453-4) show how Forster manipulated Dickens's correspondence to conform with the impression he was trying to create.

[2]Quoted from Dickens, the Critical Heritage, pp. 566-7.

Even at this relatively early stage, it would already appear that a new edition of the Life is now called for-- something far more comprehensive than A. J. Hoppé's recent edition, which falls considerably short of the requirements for a genuinely useful edition.[1]

Any new "definitive" edition (one derived from the 1876 edition revised and corrected by Forster himself) should include a generous preface, which should explain, among other things, Forster's objectives and methods (which seem to have been based on the "Romantic theory" of biography). It should also restore all of Forster's original footnotes and marginal sub-headings, as well as add judicious footnoting which should also identify (as far as possible) Forster's source material,[2] and point out any major manipulations in his use of it. An edition of the Life which would include all this (and more), would be of great value to Dickens scholars, and furthermore, it would help to preserve-- perhaps even to enhance --Forster's own reputation as a biographer and critic.

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[1] John Forster, The Life of Charles Dickens, ed. A. J. Hoppe, 2 vols. (1966), which is really no more than a reprint of the Everyman edition (1927) with a new preface and a number of new notes appended.

[2] While this chapter demonstrates that much of the criticism in the Life is taken from the Examiner, and much of what was taken was not written by Forster in the first place; and while it also helps to show the relationship of the Life and the Examiner, what it does not do, and could not do, as a part of the thesis, is to consider how far Forster may have surrounded himself with other texts and materials when he was writing the Life, and to which he made no acknowledgment. Several such sources have already been identified by Professors P. Collins and K. J. Fielding. But there must be others that have not been identified. It could be said that we may have reached a point at which while every opinion expressed in the Life is presumably Forster's, that it is impossible to be sure that any single one of them came fresh from his mind, and that one cannot say that any single one was entirely "original".

## II

In Professors Edgar Johnson and Sylvère Monod we have two views about Forster as a critic which may be taken as expressing what has been generally assumed in so far as any real consideration has been given to his ability.

The consensus of opinion, based solely on the critical commentary in the Life, seems to be that summed up by Professor Johnson:

> I don't feel that ordinarily I am a very destructive kind of critic or biographer, and yet, so far as Forster's critical contributions to the interpretation of Dickens's novels are concerned, I can find very little that seems to me either truly incisive or truly profound.
>
> It seems to me that, over and over again, Forster was skating upon the mere surface of literary criticism, and that his main claim to our gratitude lies much less in his critical comments on the novels than in the enormous amount of biographical material that he rescued from what would otherwise have been oblivion and which we owe to him and in the intimate and affectionate personal knowledge of Dickens as a human being, which serves today as one of the main perspectives that we have upon him.
>
> I should be inclined myself to praise Forster much more as biographer than as literary critic.[1]

Even Professor S. Monod, who has championed Forster more than most critics, is really only lukewarm about his literary criticism, and considers him "not a really great biographer, because he was neither a powerful thinker, nor an evenly gifted writer."[2]

More recently, in Dickens the Novelist (1970) by F. R. and Q. D. Leavis, we have had another view. But their

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[1] Edgar Johnson in Dickens Criticism: Past, Present, and Future Directions . . . (Massachusetts, 1962), p. 32.

[2] S. Monod, p. 373.

opinion seems both perceptive, and yet contradictory. At one point, when Mrs. Leavis was holding the pen, she remarks that Forster "was by no means so stupid as he often seems to be in his criticism of Dickens's novels," and goes on after this rather double-edged praise to commend him for a shrewd comment on David Copperfield (p. 38). Yet, a few pages later (p. 45), she remarks of him that he was "deaf and blind to Dickens's art, though invaluable in the insights he gives us into Dickens the man." This remark is made of his objections, so "revealingly stupid" to the "masterly 'History of a Self-Tormentor' chapter in Little Dorrit." It is hardly too much to say that the Leavises seem to have had the percipience to sense that the criticism in Forster's Life expresses the views of more than one man: a group which can simultaneously be "deaf and blind," "by no means so stupid as he often seems to be," and even "shrewd."

What is perhaps rather more interesting about their work is the way in which they also recognise that Forster's Life is admirable not directly because of its critical insight, but because of the way in which this is combined with "the insights he gives us into Dickens the man." Two of Forster's comments, not simply on Dickens the man, but on Dickens the author, are placed before their Preface, in company with one from Henry James. Then, in the Preface itself, they make very clear their preference for his Life over more modern "more 'correct' biographies. . . ." They see that by his chronological arrangement of his study of the genesis and reception of the novels, Forster gives "the only convincing representation of Dickens as the creator of

the novels for those capable of reading them with critical perception and disinterestedness." (p. ix). They rightly praise him as the only biographer who can give us the sense of "being in the same room as Dickens, and even . . . of being really inward with Dickens's personality and character." (p. x). This is a very convincing tribute to Forster's power as a biographer, and even to his power as a biographer who also occasionally turns critic. Once again, their judgment appears to be sound, although they are unable to see how they have managed to learn so much from Forster.

If we are to consider Forster as a critic of fiction in the Examiner, it will perhaps be excusable not to take up the question of his critical abilities as shown in the Life. Nevertheless, the columns of the Examiner and the pages of the three volumes of the Life have become so intermixed that such a study obviously calls out, in due course, for some attention. Already, some of the conclusions that it has been possible to draw about the authorship of the reviews in the Examiner can be seen to have a bearing on what we see of Forster as a critic in the Life.

One of the most important, perhaps, is that we can see that Forster's criticism of the later novels really is inadequate in the Life, and that he is to be blamed for this. For a time, when Professor Collins was able to suggest that perhaps Forster was the author of such Examiner reviews as that of Hard Times, Little Dorrit, or Our Mutual Friend, it suggested that as a critic he had kept pace with Dickens. This is probably not so, as I have already pointed out.

Yet, without extending the present chapter so that it

turns into a study of Forster as a critic in the Life, it can be said that it will probably be found that it shows the same qualities as we find earlier in his own life and work. He was an organiser, and entrepreneur and a journalist. For all his occasional outbursts of temperament, he was a man who combined an ability to organise with an appreciative love of literature and a certain tact. His comments almost always stand up to the tests of common sense; and, above all, those in the Life (whether his own or compilations) show an understanding of Dickens as a man. This is still a tremendously important aspect of Dickens as a novelist.

* * *

How should we now sum up Forster as a critic of fiction writing in the Examiner? Professor Monod was referring to the critical commentary in the Life when he saw him as basically a "competent and sound" critic.[1] Now although such evaluations will now need considerable qualification, judging by Forster's miscellaneous reviews in the Examiner, on the whole this is still probably the best way of describing his criticism in general-- "competent and sound." Yet there is still room for qualification, for we have seen that although Forster's attitude towards much of Thackeray's later fiction was critically defensible, it can be argued that to some extent, personal animosities may have caused Forster to take a more dogmatic stand than was justified. Conversely, although

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[1] S. Monod, "John Forster's 'Life of Dickens'. . . .", p. 364.

much of what Forster said about Lytton's fiction was sound, too often his criticism seems to have been softened because of their close friendship. Again, it is also clear that Forster was often obliged to treat a novel less than objectively because of the policy of the Examiner. Yet on the whole, he was a much fairer critic than one would have expected for such a strong-willed person and for a reviewer on a relatively radical journal such as the Examiner.

"Competent and sound" is certainly no small recommendation for any critic, and it is almost certainly the sort of reputation that Forster would have wanted most.

# APPENDIX A

## THACKERAY ON THE STAFF OF THE "EXAMINER"

The first intimation we have that Thackeray was interested in joining the staff of the Examiner occurs in a letter written to his mother in December 1839:

> . . . F[1] is a very kind & gentlemanlike individual-- you know about that vacant place on the Examiner he said he had written to Mrs Fonblanque to ask her to sound my wife & see if I wd take it-- it wd be great labour & no pay but if I had the courage to keep it for 3 years I should have a good smattering of politics, and might so hope to maintain myself in a comfortable dishonesty for the rest of my days. . . .[2]

Now, apart from telling us that Thackeray was interested in the vacancy, the letter also reveals that already his attitude towards journalism as a career was such that he could never be at heart an integral member of the Examiner clique. Perhaps Fonblanque and Forster sensed this; perhaps Thackeray decided that after all he did not want the job, or perhaps there was a more suitable man available. At any rate, we know that Laman Blanchard[3] eventually got the appointment, and that he held it until his death in 1845.

It is not clear exactly what duties were involved in the place that Thackeray had missed, but according to Renton, Blanchard worked directly under Forster.[4] By this time,

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[1] Could be either Fonblanque or Forster.

[2] Letters of Thackeray, I, 400.

[3] Samuel Laman Blanchard (1804-45; DNB), actor, journalist, poet, biographer of L. E. Landon.

[4] Renton, p. 227-8.

Forster was in effect (if not in fact) the assistant-editor, responsible not only for the literary and theatrical columns, but also (with the help of the new subeditor) for the fine print sections of the journal, such as the birth and death, and crime columns. Thus, we can assume that although Blanchard must have helped Forster with the odd literary or theatrical notice, he probably spent most of his time with scissors and paste in the other sections under Forster's control.

A few weeks after Blanchard's suicide (15 February 1845), Fonblanque appointed Thackeray to the vacancy at a salary of four pounds a week.[1] He held this position, simultaneously with his position on the Morning Chronicle, probably between the outside dates of 10 March[2] and 25 July, 1845.[3]

During these months, if we are to assume that his new assignment was the same as Blanchard's had been, and that it paralleled Philip's subeditorship on the Pall Mall Gazette,[4] it would appear that he was concerned with most aspects of the journal's inside pages, and that he too worked directly

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[1] Letters of Thackeray, II, 189, and 203.

[2] Probably this date, because in a letter (28 March 1845; Letters of Thackeray, II, 189) he writes, "I have been now near 3 weeks doing the Examiner. . . ." Thus, if we are to take him literally, the earliest date of his starting would have been the Monday following the issue of 8 March.

[3] Probably this date, because in a letter (26 July 1845; Letters of Thackeray, II, 203.), he writes, "The Examiner and I have parted company. . . ." The last issue of the Examiner that he could have worked on previous to this letter, went to the presses the evening before.

[4] The story of Philip's association with the Pall Mall Gazette, is told in chapters 30-4, The Adventures of Philip (Works, XI, 475-535).

under Forster. For, in a letter to his mother (28 March 1845), he wrote that he was "occupied nearly all day with writing and scissoring,"[1] and in Philip (1862), we see him "installed in the sub-editor's room, with a provision of scissors, wafers, and pastepots, snipping paragraphs from this paper and that, altering, condensing, giving titles, and so forth," not dealing with "the leading articles, or those profound yet witty literary essays" but with "the births, deaths, marriages, markets, trials, and what not."[2]

In fact, we know that Thackeray did contribute the odd review and leader to the Examiner during his subeditorship. In this same letter to his mother, he writes: "I must write to day about the President's message,[3] of a Review I must make tonight of a new book of the Examiner's printers. . . ."[4] Now, although nothing else of Thackeray's strikes the eye at a casual glance through the four months that he was with the Examiner, it may be expected that (as with Dickens[5]) a more concentrated search may reveal a few more pieces.

In this belief, we start with the possibility that Thackeray may have occasionally reviewed a book simultaneously

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[1] Letters of Thackeray, II, 189-90.

[2] Chapter 31; Works, XI, 482-3.

[3] "Polk's First Address", Examiner (29 March 1845).

[4] Unidentified. The only review in this issue of the Examiner concerns Mrs. A. Marsh's Mount Sorel; or the Heiress of the De Veres, and there is nothing in it to suggest that Thackeray wrote it.

[5] See below, Appendix C, and p.174.

in the Examiner and in the Morning Chronicle, and that there may be enough similarities to confirm ascription. This possibility might not seem unlikely, because he had complained, in his letter[1] that the work for the Examiner was taking "a deal more time" than he had "bargained for." Such an arrangement would have been convenient to him.

On turning to Gordon Ray's Thackeray's Contributions to the Morning Chronicle (1966), we find that only two articles written by Thackeray, during the four and a half months we are concerned with, have been identified. Both of them are literary reviews, and both are of books that were also reviewed in the Examiner shortly afterwards.

The first book so noticed is of St Patrick's Eve, by Charles Lever. This was a new novel, and one which exposed the abuse of the absentee landlord, blaming it for many of the social and economic problems in Ireland. There are some points of general agreement between the two notices in the Morning Chronicle and the Examiner,[2] but there is nothing to suggest that they were written by the same hand. The most we can conjecture, is that Thackeray and Forster may have discussed the book together, since they both had a special interest in Irish affairs generally. Such a conversation may have prompted some of the points of agreement between the two reviews.

The second book noticed in both journals, was Disraeli's Sybil (1845). It was reviewed in the Morning Chronicle on

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[1] Op. Cit. (28 March 1845).

[2] Morning Chronicle (3 April 1845); Examiner (5 April 1845), p. 212.

Tuesday, 13 May, and in the Examiner, on Saturday, 17 May. Yet, although both reviews generally agree that the plot of the story is improbable and clumsy, that Disraeli did not really understand the working-classes he attempts to portray, and that his panacea for the problem of the "Two Nations" is unrealistic, there is again nothing to indicate conclusively that both reviews were written by the same hand. It should not surprise us if we find that Thackeray and Forster (if Forster were the Examiner's reviewer) hold similar liberal views about the book. It might seem strange, though, that if Thackeray had recently reviewed the book for the Morning Chronicle, Forster would not have allowed him to review it for the Examiner as well, especially as the views expressed in both reviews are basically the same. Nevertheless, we can only surmise that Thackeray may have had some hand or say in its composition.

Of course, this relatively unfruitful approach in an attempt to identify articles written by Thackeray, is only one of several that are worth trying. However, the implementation of other approaches really belongs to a separate study which is outside the scope of this thesis.

When Thackeray left the staff of the Examiner a few months later, he told his mother in a letter (26 July 1845), that the Examiner and he had "parted company in the best humour possible."[1] He gave as reasons for his withdrawal, that "it took more time" than he could "afford to give for four sovereigns," and suggested facetiously that he "was

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[1] Letters of Thackeray, II, 203.

much too clever a fellow to do it well; making omissions blunders &c, wh an honest plodding clerk would never have fallen into." His concluding remark: "So that chain is off my leg", becomes more significant in the light of what he was to say some seventeen years afterwards about his experience with the Examiner, its editors and its policies.

To be fair, most of Thackeray's rather impassioned remarks in Philip (1862) about Forster (Bickerton) should probably be taken more in context with the series of disagreements that had occurred since 1845, rather than with his own subeditorship with the Examiner.[1] Yet, allowing for these differences, it is quite predictable that Thackeray should have felt stifled or "enchained" in his relationship with the editors and contributors of the Examiner, in 1845, simply because (as already mentioned) he was not, from the very beginning, at heart, one of them. He certainly suffered from what Dickens was to call a "feigned want of earnestness."[2]

This reservation is shown in what seems to have been his rather thin-skinned attitude towards the journal's political policies that he was naturally obliged to countenance. Describing Philip's duties on the Pall Mall Gazette--probably paralleling Thackeray's on the Examiner --he writes:

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[1]Some of these differences are referred to in chapter 2 above, others centred on their differing views of the dignity of letters-- a subject that would have lead beyond the scope of this thesis.

[2]Charles Dickens, "In Memoriam, W. M. Thackeray", The Cornhill Magazine (February 1864); reprinted in the Collected Papers.

> . . . on Tuesday of every week . . . it was this modest sub-editor's duty to begin snipping and pasting paragraphs for the ensuing Saturday's issue. He cut down the parliamentary speeches, giving due favouritism to the orators of the Pall Mall Gazette party, and meagre outlines of their opponent's discourses. If the leading public men on the side of the Pall Mall Gazette gave entertainments, you may be sure they were duly chronicled in the fashionable intelligence; if one of their party wrote a book it was pretty sure to get praise from the critic.[1]

Above all, what must really have galled Thackeray, at least in retrospect, was that his position on the staff implied agreement with the Examiner's especial support of such writers and actors of its faction as Lytton or Macready. Philip observes of the Pall Mall Gazette: "Certain people were praised . . . certain others were attacked. Very dull books were admired, and very lively works attacked. Some men were praised for everything they did; some others were satirised, no matter what their works were."[2] He then goes on to instance that "Harrocks, the tragedian, of Druary Lane:[3] every piece in which he appears is a masterpiece, and his performance the greatest triumph ever witnessed. . . . But Balderson, of Covent Garden,[4] is also a very fine actor. Why can't our critic see his merit as well as Harrocks? Poor Balderson is never allowed any merit at all. He is passed over with a sneer, or a curt word of

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[1]Chapter 31; Works, XI, 486.

[2]Chapter 34; Works, XI, 524-5.

[3]Macready.

[4]Charles Kean.

cold commendation, while columns of flattery are not enough for his rival."

Again, there is a passage in Philip which suggests more the relationship of Forster and Thackeray after 1845. He writes (through Pendennis): "Then there was a certain author whom Bickerton was for ever attacking. They had had a private quarrel, and Bickerton revenged himself in this way. In reply to Philip's outcries and remonstrances, Mr. Mugford only laughed: 'The two men are enemies, and Bickerton hits him whenever he can. Why, that's only human nature. . . ."[1]

Philip was eventually to leave the Pall Mall Gazette because he found that the "slavery" was "beginning to be awful." He comments of his employer: "He feeds me. He hasn't beat me yet. When I was away . . . I did not feel the chain so much. But it is scarcely tolerable now, when I have to see my gaoler four or five times a week."[2]

Philip's sense of confinement may or may not be based on Thackeray's experience with the Examiner. However, we can well imagine that the domineering Forster could easily have had this effect on him, regardless of Fonblanque's own treatment of the new subeditor.

Shortly after Thackeray had left the Examiner, his relations with Forster gradually grew worse because of their basic differences already mentioned.[3] Thackeray's caricatures

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[1]Chapter 34; Works, XI, 525.

[2]Ibid., p. 526.

[3]See above, pp. 20-1.

of Forster,[1] ostensibly caused the "false as Hell" row in 1847, and after that their friendship was frequently broken off and renewed, until eventually in 1860, the break seems to have been final.[2]

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[1]Such as the one in Thackeray's letter to Sir James Emerson Tennent (1-3 October 1846). Letters of Thackeray, II, 252.

[2]Suggested by Thackeray's letter, Letters of Thackeray, IV, 238: Thackeray died in December 1863, and there is no record of a reconciliation with Forster after the date of this letter.

# APPENDIX B

## FORSTER AND "HOUSEHOLD WORDS" AND "THE HOUSEHOLD NARRATIVE OF CURRENT EVENTS", 1850-1855

### I

Mention has been made in the chapter on Forster and Dickens, of the extent to which the two friends were connected journalistically through Dickens's regular contributions to the Examiner.[1] Thus, as was also pointed out in that chapter, Dickens can be seen to have become a member of a rather special team of journalists, influencing them and being influenced by them. But interestingly enough, even after Dickens began Household Words in March 1850 and no longer wrote so regularly for the Examiner, Forster and he still retained some journalistic ties.

One of these ties was in the way that Forster assumed some responsibility in the monthly compilation of the news supplement to Household Words (The Household Narrative of Current Events), and another, was in the way that he may have acted as a factotum for Household Words itself.

As far as one can tell, his journalistic involvement with these journals coincided approximately with his joint-proprietorship of Household Words (March 1850 to February 1856). However, so far, it has only been possible to establish Forster's actual journalistic activity in them for the first four years after their establishment.

According to an agreement drawn up (28 March 1850), Forster was to have a one eighth share in Household Words,

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[1] See above, pp. 174-6.

and in return was "from time to time to contribute Literary Articles . . . without any additional remuneration for the same."[1] In fact, Forster did contribute seven articles to the journal.[2] But three of these were brief and fairly insubstantial, and the remaining four (biographical essays, which may be essentially abridgments from books in his library) hardly seem sufficient to have fulfilled the requirements of the contract.

However, it so happens that the question of the "missing" contributions can be resolved, since Whitwell Elwin (Forster's lifelong friend) tells us that Forster "had a share in compiling the Household Narrative of Current Events. . . .",[3] and it is clear that his work there was intended as a partial fulfilment of his part of the agreement.

Yet, before examing Forster's part in compiling the monthly issues of the Household Narrative, it will be helpful if we take a quick look at the make-up of the journal itself.

The Household Narrative of Current Events (January 1850-

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[1] I am obliged to Professor K. J. Fielding, who drew my attention to the Bradbury and Evans affidavit (P.R.O. C31/1392/1608), which mentions the terms of the original agreement-- quoted in the text above-- and goes on to say that "John Forster retired from the said partnership some years ago February 1856 and with the consent of the other parties sold and assigned his share therein to the Defendent Charles Dickens . . ." This affidavit was presented at the time of the dissolution of Household Words, which Bradbury and Evans (its publishers) opposed.

[2] See Bibliography, under "Forster".

[3] Whitwell Elwin, "John Forster," A Catalogue of the Printed Books Bequethed by John Forster Esq., LL.D (1888), p. xxi.

December 1855)[1] which formed a monthly supplement to Household Words was designed as "a perfectly impartial digest and record, that shall from month to month as faithfully keep note of the changing opinions, as it records the unchanging facts, which constitute the History of the time. Not subserving party politics, yet not excluding anything that claims to be a part of the actual interests of the day. . . ."[2] By publishing it monthly, and by stressing its chronicle aspect, Dickens avoided having to pay the newspaper stamp-duty, thus making it possible to keep its price down to twopence. This was within the reach of most purses, and gave in capsule form most things to be found in the more expensive daily or weekly newspapers.

The journal was generally twenty-four pages long, each page being uniform in size, and in essential lay out with its companion Household Words, with which it was sometimes bound in volume form. The print, however, was much finer.

The chief section opening each issue--"The Three Kingdoms"-- was a capsulated summary of the news-worthy events that had occurred in the previous month. This was followed by sections on politics, law and crime, accident and disaster (a generous allotment usually being made to these last two sections), social sanitary and municipal progress, personal and obituaries, colonies and dependencies, foreign events, literature and art, and finally, a section

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[1] The April number (actually the fourth) was the first to be published. The January, February, and March numbers were back-dated and issued in time to complete the volume for the year. (See footnote in the April issue, p. 73). It is difficult to decide whether or not these numbers were compiled in retrospect.

[2] Household Narrative (December 1852), p. 265.

relating to business news.

Such a compilation apparently found a fairly ready market.[1] But, during December 1851, Dickens's right to avoid the stamp-duty was challenged in the Court of the Exchequer. However, the Court gave judgement in Dickens's favour, stating that it was not a newspaper, but "a mere chronicle, whether it contained late events or not,"[2] therefore as such it was not held liable to the duty.

From May 1855, when the duty was repealed for all newspapers, the circulation of the supplement must have been greatly reduced, now that the daily and weekly papers were also unstamped. This was probably the chief reason why Dickens decided to end its publication at the close of that year.

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[1] According to G. J. Holyoak, writing in his Sixty Years of An Agitator's Life, 2 vols. (1892), I. 282, Dickens was said to be liable to a yearly loss of £4,000, had the Household Narrative ceased publication in 1851. This sum, if correct, suggests that the supplement enjoyed a fairly wide circulation.

[2] Quoted from the Household Narrative (December 1851), p. 269; see also for a full report of the case.
The prosecution was prompted by the "Association for Promoting the Repeal of Taxes on Knowledge." Its committee included such people as Bright, Cobden, Gladstone, G.H. Lewes, Joseph Hume, and Forster himself. The purpose in drawing particular attention to the Household Narrative, was to discredit the newspaper stamp duty by underlining the inequalities in its enforcement by the officials of the Inland Revenue. Holyoak explains (I, 281), "As Punch, the Athenaeum, the Builder, and Dickens's Household Narrative of Current Events all contained news weekly, and were not required to be stamped, the attention of Mr. Timm of Inland Revenue, was called to these cases. When he intimidated small country publishers by threatening them with prosecution, we asked why he assailed publishers whom prosecution would ruin, and left unmolested rich offenders who could defend themselves."
I am grateful to Professor K. J. Fielding for allowing me to consult and use his notes on the action against the Household Narrative.

II

By comparing the literary notices in the Examiner with the brief critical comments in the literary section of the Household Narrative, at least part of Forster's share in the compilation of the supplement can be guessed at, since there are many examples of parallel passages. Compare, for example, the following extracts, the one from the Household Narrative, and the other from the Examiner:

> It is highly fitting and appropriate that the Mr. Jenkins who proposes this should have taken the same occasion of contrasting professional 'authors of the middling and lower order,' as a public nuisance, with cravings 'after literary fame in men of rank and fortune,' as a symptom of social progress.[1]

> It is worthy of Mr. Jenkins himself to take the occasion of contrasting professional 'authors of the middling and lower order' as a public nuisance, with cravings after 'literary fame in men of rank and fortune' as a symptom of social progress.[2]

Again, compare these two extracts from reviews of a new translation of Hariri's Makamet by T. Preston. The first is from the Household Narrative:

> The design of this Eastern classic was to display the vast resources of Arabic in a series of rhythmical and metrical anecdotes containing all the riches of the language, and illustrating its rare words, proverbs, and figurative and enigmatic expressions.[3]

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[1] Household Narrative (January 1850), p. 23.

[2] Examiner (5 January 1850), p. 2.

[3] Household Narrative (November 1850), p. 263.

> It was to display the vast resources of the Arabic language, to exemplify the most difficult methods of composition, and to embody in a series of rhythmical and metrical anecdotes all the refinements of grammar, rhetoric, poetry, history, and tradition, that the author's extensive learning could supply.[1]

Finally, in making such comparisons, the introductory remarks to the literary section in the Household Narrative of September 1851, concerns the exposure of a literary fraud, which had recently been exposed. The Examiner had also made a rather lengthy mention of the same imposture, and had concluded its remarks with an assertion that the authoress of a recently published volume of personal memoirs about the Hungarian up-rising of 1848-9, "turns out to have been no baroness, but a common spy. . . ."[2] The Household Narrative account parallels that of the Examiner in several general respects, but specifically, when it also remarks that the "so-called 'Baroness Von Beck,' . . . turns out to have been no baroness, but a common spy. . . ."[3]

There are other fairly convincing parallels during 1850, and especially, 1851,[4] and on this basis it seems reasonable to suppose that Forster either compiled the literary section of the Household Narrative himself, or that he supervised its compilation. In any case, whoever was

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[1] Examiner (30 November 1850), p. 767.

[2] Ibid. (6 September 1851), p. 565.

[3] Household Narrative (September, 1851), p. 215.

[4] Compare, for example, Household Narrative (May 1851), p. 118, with Examiner (10 May 1851), p. 291; Household Narrative (June 1851), p. 143, with Examiner (28 June 1851), p. 401; and Household Narrative (November 1851), p. 263, with Examiner (29 November 1851), p. 754.

responsible, it is clear that a generous use was made of the files of the Examiner, and that this would not have been done without Forster's consent.

However, after 1852, the literary section in the Household Narrative really amounts to little more than a mere listing of books. This was apparently taken from such a source as the seven-column listing of new and forthcoming books in the advertisement section at the back of each issue of the Examiner. In fact, this very source remains a real possibility. Yet, even though there is usually no real critical commentary attached to each reference after 1852, it seems possible, in view of the agreement made with Dickens, that directly or indirectly, Forster was still responsible for the literary section for the remainder of the publication of the supplement.

As far as this section in the Household Narrative is concerned, it is difficult to see that it will tell us anything significantly new about Forster as a critic. For, although there are sixty such sections over the five years, and although it may be that Forster was in one way or another responsible for most of them, even before 1852 they are often simply lists of new publications or new editions, with very little, or no, critical commentary. It would be fair to summarise that they are generally of little value in themselves.

In two respects only, can these lists be seen to be potentially helpful. Firstly, provided Forster's hand in them can be established, they may help to give some idea of what current publications he really thought important—

something not necessarily apparent in the Examiner, since, as he wrote to John Hill Burton, the Scottish historian (5 May 1849), speaking of the literary reviews there: "Unfortunately the choice one is obliged to make for the limited space allotted to reviews cannot always be determined by the importance of the subject - unhappily the non-importance of it is too frequently the more pressing reason for a preference."[1] In the Household Narrative, where this was not so much a problem, because of the small amount of critical commentary, the lists of current publications tend to feature (as we might expect with Forster) histories and biographies.

Secondly, these lists of new publications may occasionally be helpful (again, if it can be shown that Forster compiled them) in that such critical commentary as exists, sometimes crystalises views previously expressed at more length in a related review in the Examiner. We might expect to find a few instances where this may be quite revealing.

Now, the possibility that Forster was in some way responsible for the literary section in the Household Narrative is given further credence by the likelihood that for three years he wrote regularly elsewhere in the journal.

Henry Morley makes a reference, in a letter to his wife (December 1851), to "poor, nice old Hogarth [Dickens's father-in-law] . . . the good simple-minded man who, you know, compounds the news of household narrative out of the

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[1]From an unpublished letter, Scottish National Library, C76 (Temporary Catalogue Number).

papers."[1] Yet, more to the point, he also mentions in the same letter, that "Forster does its leading article." This is a reference to the leading article of each issue: "The Three Kingdoms".

Morley was on fairly close terms with both Dickens and Forster by this time,[2] and so we can place a reasonable degree of reliance on his letter. Besides, such a probability should hardly surprise those at all familiar with the Household Narrative. The opening section up to the close of 1852, was obviously written by a very competent journalist and political commentator, and in places reads much like Forster, while in others there are some convincing Dickensian touches.[3] It seems reasonable to conclude, therefore, that from 1850 to 1852, the section was largely written by a journalist of some merit-- most likely, as Morley claimed, by Forster-- with further amendments and additions by Dickens himself, in keeping with his usual editorial practice in Household Words.[4]

Supporting this, is the fact that three of Forster's four major contributions to Household Words itself, occur in

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[1] Quoted in H. S. Solly's The Life of Henry Morley (1898), p. 200.

[2] Morley had been writing for both Household Words and the Examiner from 1850, and his letters (in Solly) are full of references to meetings with both Forster and Dickens during 1850 and 1851.

[3] For example, see the comments on poverty in Ireland and London, and on George Ruby-- the "Jo" of Bleak House-- Household Narrative (January 1850), pp. 2-3; see also the passage on the trial of the Rev. Joseph Smith, Household Narrative (August 1851), pp. 170-1. Both of these sections sound decidedly Dickensian.

[4] See, Charles Dickens' Uncollected Writings from "Household Words" 1850-59, ed. Harry Stone, 2 vols. (Bloomington, 1968), I, 36-43.

the following year (see Bibliography). The suggestion is, that Forster was now obliged to contribute "from time to time" to the Household Words, instead of to the Household Narrative, in order that he might be able to conform to the terms of the agreement he had made with Dickens in 1850. For, as a notice in the supplement explains, from the close of 1852 the "Three Kingdoms" section no longer required his (or another's) editorial commentary:

> . . . it has been decided to abandon the introductory article which has hitherto formed a part of each month's number under the head of THE THREE KINGDOMS. This alteration has been determined on, both in consideration of the advisability of separating the expression of opinion from a faithful record of events; and in consideration of that record requiring all the space we can allot to it.[1]

At about the same time, we recall, the literary section in the supplement underwent a similar purging of critical commentary, although perhaps not to the same extent. The same conclusion is suggested; namely, that at the end of 1852, Forster largely fulfilled his contractile obligations by writing in the Household Words instead of in its supplement.

Now it is evident that if Forster and Dickens did indeed occasionally write the "Three Kingdoms" section together, up to the close of 1852, then a detailed study may tell us more about Dickens's journalistic relationship with Forster. Further, it should also be possible to

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[1] Household Narrative (January 1853), p. 1.

identify some further fragments of Dickens's writing in that section. But a greater interest is in the way that it may be possible to trace the origin of some of the themes in Dickens's fiction, thus giving them a new dimension, and illustrating the way that the novelist assimilated raw materials that perhaps he and Forster had considered together.

III

I have suggested that Forster may also have acted as a sort of factotum for Household Words itself during its establishment in 1850, and until his retirement from journalism at the close of 1855. Yet, it must be admitted that actual evidence for supposing this, is sketchy, since there are virtually no letters extant between Forster and Dickens during these years. Evidence, therefore, tends to be circumstantial; but, even so, it may be possible to build up a reasonable case for supposing that Forster's involvement with Household Words was other than simply as a shareholder and contributor.

In the first place, it is surely unlikely that Dickens, however much he wanted to be his own editor, would have failed to make use of Forster's considerable editorial and legal experience. That he did so, at least during the first year or so, is suggested in the way that he consulted Forster during the planning stages of the journal, so that it was to Forster he went for approval of its title,[1] and it was Forster

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[1] Letters(N), II, 202.

who suggested that W. H. Wills be the subeditor,[1] and it was most likely Forster again who also busied himself with many of the legal aspects of establishing the journal, just as he was to be given a power of attorney to act on Dickens's behalf at the dissolution of Household Words (December 1858).[2]

Other evidences of Forster's particular concern with Household Words can be seen in his frequent extracting from the journal in the Examiner, and in what appears to be a public relations role with respect to Mrs. Gaskell (see above, p.152). Finally, it may be no coincidence that R. H. Horne, Henry Morley, Dudley Costello, Mrs. Gaskell, Geraldine Jewsbury, and Douglas Jerrold, all initially friends of Forster rather than of Dickens, were among the earliest contributors to the Household Words.[3]

Obviously, Forster's part in the establishing and running of Household Words and the Household Narrative from 1850 to approximately 1855, will need a closer examination than has been possible in this appendix. For example, one of the questions still unanswered, is how Forster fulfilled his obligations to the journal during 1854 and 1855. These were years during which he neither contributed articles, nor

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[1] Life, 6, IV, 65.

[2] Once again, I am grateful to Professor K. J. Fielding, for pointing this out to me.

[3] This information, from the Household Words Contributors' Book, a transcript of which was kindly loaned to me by Professor K. J. Fielding, for use throughout this appendix.

apparently supervised anything more demanding than the literary section in the Household Narrative-- if even that. Certain other points need clarifying also, before any significant inferences can be drawn about this extention of a very interesting journalistic relationship between Dickens and Forster.

# APPENDIX C

## DICKENS, FONBLANQUE, FORSTER, AND A REVIEW OF "JACK SHEPPARD"

According to Fonblanque's nephew, author of his Life and Labours,[1] at some time during 1839,[2] Fonblanque sent a private note to Forster in which the following passage occurs: "I see 'Jack Sheppard' has been dramatised. I really think we abdicate our critical duty in not attacking this disgusting sort of publication. If you don't,I must!"[3]

The review of the novel prompted by this note is clearly the one which appeared in the Examiner during November that year.[4] It is an exceptionally long review (nine columns) for the Examiner of the time, and in view of its length should be readily ascribable. However, there are surprisingly few distinctive characteristics that might indicate that either Fonblanque or Forster wrote it. It has always previously been ascribed to Forster, perhaps because according to Ainsworth's biographer, the author of Jack Sheppard himself was under the impression, then, and for many years afterwards, that Forster had written the review.[5] But

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[1] Albany Fonblanque, The Life and Labours of Albany Fonblanque, ed. E.B. de Fonblanque (1874).

[2] Probably at the end of October. The note could have been prompted by the opening of Jack Sheppard at the Adelphi, 28 October 1839.

[3] Fonblanque, p. 428.

[4] Examiner (3 November 1839), pp. 691-3.

[5] S. M. Ellis, William Harrison Ainsworth and his Friends, 2 vols. (1911), I, 358-9.

Ainsworth could well have made the common mistake of assuming that Forster wrote all the major reviews of fiction in the Examiner.

Yet whatever reasons Ainsworth had for assuming this, it is necessary to emphasise that nowhere has Forster shown himself to be capable of writing with the skill evident in this review-- Forster's strength was in his critical soundness, and not in fanciful prose or irony.

In fact parts of the review, in style and tone, are strongly suggestive of Dickens, who had good grounds for having some hand (or say) in a review which spelled out the contrasts in the treatment of vice in such novels as Jack Sheppard and Fielding's Jonathan Wild. For, although the review does not mention Oliver Twist by name, it is clearly implicated in the whole discussion. Forster makes this even more emphatic for us because he used a large part of this review in compiling the critical account of Oliver Twist in the Life.[1]

Dickens was greatly annoyed with the comparisons that a number of critics were making between Oliver Twist and Jack Sheppard.[2] Such comparisons were encouraged by the circumstances surrounding the publication of Jack Sheppard. We know, for example, that Dickens was concerned that Bentley was advertising it as "uniform in size and price

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[1] See below, pp. 289-92.

[2] For specific examples of some of the comparisons that were being made, and for a full discussion, see Philip Collins, Dickens and Crime (1964), pp. 257-9.

with Oliver Twist."[1] Other comparisons were naturally being drawn between them, because Jack Sheppard was the novel that followed Oliver Twist in Bentley's Miscellany after its editorship was transferred from Dickens to Ainsworth, and because both novels were illustrated in that periodical by George Cruikshank.

A few months later, Dickens expressed his continuing annoyance, and his readiness to react, in a letter to R. H. Horne:

> I am by some jolter-headed enemies most unjustly and untruly charged with having written a book after Mr. Ainsworth's fashion. Unto these jolter-heads and their intensely concentrated humbug, I shall take an early opportunity of temperately replying. If this opportunity had presented itself and I had made this vindication, I could have no objection to set my hand to what I know to be true concerning the late lamented John Sheppard, but I feel a great repugnance to do so now, lest it should seem an ungenerous and unmanly way of disavowing any sympathy with that school, and a means of shielding myself.[2]

Now, this letter was written at about February 1840, whereas the review under question appeared in the Examiner during November 1839. Even so, while the letter suggests that Dickens was not chiefly responsible for the review, it does not preclude the possibility that he had either some hand in it, or, as might be expected, that the subject was at least talked over with him before it was written, and perhaps discussed intensively.

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[1] Letters(P), I, 617, and 617,n.

[2] Ibid., II, 20-1.

Dickens openly replied to his critics, as promised in his letter to Horne, in the preface to the third edition of Oliver Twist (1841). The preface echoes his concern about the comparisons being made between Oliver Twist and Jack Sheppard. It also echoes the tag (to be found in the review in question) about the "soul of goodness in things evil," since the reviewer explains, that such earlier novelists as Le Sage and Fielding, or Gay in the Beggar's Opera and Hogarth in his plates, sought not only to "discover the soul of goodness in things evil" but also "to brand the stamp of evil upon things the world was apt to think good." Now, it is most inconclusive to suggest that many other passages and expressions in the review of Jack Sheppard have the air of being by Dickens, nevertheless, this must be taken into account.

Further, it is perhaps not irrelevant, in considering the part that Dickens may have had in this review, that several references are made to histories, or biographies of the real Jack Sheppard in the course of the review. The point is, that Forster's library did not include any such book, according to the catalogue of the library as he left it.[1] On the other hand, Dickens's library did include such a work.[2] When engaged in journalism, one has the clear

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[1] Forster Collection: a Catalogue of Printed Books, and A Catalogue of Paintings, Manuscripts, Autograph Letters, Pamphlets, etc. (1888).

[2] For example: D. Defoe, A Narrative of all the Robberies, Escapes . . . of John Sheppard . . . Written by Himself (1724); also, (very scarce), A Select and Important Account of the Lives, and Behaviour . . . of the Most Remarkable Convicts from 1700 to the Present Time, 3 vols. (1745).

impression that Forster and Dickens relied on books that were to hand; there was no going out to a library, or borrowing from a friend's, when the work had to be almost immediately ready for the press.

Finally, apart from the facts that Dickens can be seen to have had good grounds, and an expressed readiness to write such a review, there was also a precedent in that he had already contributed other articles to the Examiner.[1] Yet, until further external evidence can be brought to bear, actual ascription to Dickens, in whole or part, will remain speculative.

Similarly, Fonblanque's note to Forster might suggest that he wrote the review himself, and supporting this, is the fact that, according to his nephew, he did write the next attack on Jack Sheppard.[2] Further, it may be noted that about two weeks after the first review, Dickens was sending him an inscribed Nickleby (14 November), and writing that he hoped to see more of him.[3] However, despite a rather fanciful style that in some respects he shared with Dickens, there is nothing conclusive (in the review under question) to indicate his authorship.

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[1] See below, p. 174.

[2] Fonblanque, pp. 428-9; found in the Examiner (28 June 1840), p. 402. The article is a response to Courvoisier's confession that he ascribed his crimes to a reading of Jack Sheppard. Assuming that Fonblanque wrote this, it is likely that he then also wrote the brief follow-up leader in answer to a letter written by Ainsworth (published in the Morning Chronicle), Examiner (12 July 1840), p. 434.

[3] Letters(P), I, 603.

Thus, for the time being, perhaps the most definite thing about the review is not so much that Dickens or Fonblanque *might* have written all or part of it, but that Forster almost certainly did *not*-- beyond perhaps some editorial pruning.

This being so, then it appears that Forster has been done an injustice in the assumption first promoted by Ellis, that he wrote the review-- an attack on an old, although temporarily estranged friend-- because he was jealously "angry that *Jack Sheppard* should have eclipsed, even temporarily the fame of *Oliver Twist*."[1] No doubt Forster was extremely annoyed to see bad literature eclipse good, especially where Dickens's work was concerned, and no doubt there was also an element of personal resentment. However, it is not unlikely that in fact Forster had misgivings about the indelicacy of his personally attacking the work of an old friend and avowed admirer,[2] and that he allowed, or asked, Dickens, Fonblanque, or another, to help him to write the review.

The review itself is interesting-- even entertaining, and it is easy to forget what it reminds us, that *Jack Sheppard* really does descend to a level of puerile and rather disgusting horror, totally avoided by *Oliver Twist*. They *were* in a different class.

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[1] Ellis, I, 371.

[2] Ainsworth wrote flatteringly of Forster, in the preface of the first edition of *Crichton* (1838). His comments were expunged from later editions.

There is only room here for an abridgment of the closing paragraphs, which are manifestly not by Forster, but which could quite conceivably be by Dickens:

> . . . So thoroughly has the writer identified his sympathies at least with the crime of his hero as a trifling peccadillo, and indeed with thieves and murderers in general as naughty but yet amusing people, that the fatal rope which has awaited them from the first page of his book to the last, seems now in the nature of an unworthy if not unrighteous thing. The idea of Mr Sheppard, the heir presumptive to the baronetcy, dying by hemp-seed! The nice imaginations of the book cannot tolerate it. . . . The gentility of a bullet is therefore called in aid, and "thus died Jack Sheppard." . . .
>
> But let no simple reader for an instant suppose that he died so! The real Jack Sheppard, be assured, danced upon nothing and turned him round with the best that have ever been notorious for that remarkable feat, and verily do we believe that of all who have at any time "died suddenly" at Tyburn, none deserved his fate more richly. No man ever sucked the moisture of the last consolatory orange, or felt the nip of the last fatal noose, or strove to fix his listless eyes on the ghastly prayer-book, for whom, in our opinion, the Tyburn tree was more aptly kept than Jack Sheppard. He was of the very refuse of the rope. None more base have ever favoured an anxious and curious public with sight of themselves in nightcap on a public platform, and never may a "more audacious dog", to use the language of a Newgate Ordinary, "hope to stretch a halter."[1]
>
> It is recorded that, shortly after his execution, a sermon of allusion to his last extraordinary escape (at which we more than suspect the turnkeys connived) was preached by a notorious person in the city, and from this we venture, in concluding this article, to take one ingenious passage. Thus it ran.

---

[1]This passage in particular seems to reflect on Dickens's assertion in his letter to R. H. Horne (Letters(P) II, 20-1) that provided he had openly replied to the charges made by "some jolter-headed enemies . . . with having written a book after Mr. Ainsworth's fashion," he could "have no objection" to set his hand to what he knew "to be true concerning the late lamented John Sheppard."

> "Let me exhort ye then to open the locks of your hearts with the nail of repentance; burst asunder the fetters of your beloved lusts; mount the chimney of hope; take from thence the bar of good resolution, break through the stone wall of despair, and all the strongholds in the dark entry of the valley of the shadow of death; raise yourself to the leads of divine meditation; fix the blanket of faith with the spike of the Church; let yourselves down to the turner's house of resignation, and descend the stairs of humility; so shall ye come to the door of deliverance from the prison of iniquity, and escape the clutches of that old executioner the Devil, who goeth about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour."[1]

Now, parodying this parody, let us exhort Mr Ainsworth to open the locks of his brain with the nail of common sense and nature, to burst assunder the fetters of his beloved bookseller,[2] mount the chimney of manly aspiration, take from thence the bar of good resolution, break through the frail wall of purchased puff, and all the strongholds in the dark entry of the valley of New Burlington street,[3] and raise himself to the leads of "divine meditation." Then will he be content to fix such another wet blanket as the present book on the sharp spike of a sense of its utter unworthiness; let it gently down to the trunkmaker's house of resignation; and descend the stairs of humility. And so shall he come to the door of deliverance from the panderers of the moment, and escape the clutches of that old executioner he wots of, who goeth about like a slinking wolf, seeking whom he may devour.[4]

When this is so, and his talents are engaged in no unworthy work, we shall rejoice again to welcome him, heartily as of old.

---

[1] Authorship untraced. The passage parallels Sheppard's last escape from Newgate. The story is told in detail in Ainsworth's Jack Sheppard, chapters 17-21.

[2] Richard Bentley (1794-1871; DNB). Publisher of Oliver Twist, and Bentley's Miscellany, which Dickens edited for a time. A full version of Dickens's stormy relations with him is given in Edgar Johnson's Charles Dickens, his Tragedy and Triumph (1953), I, 234-53.

[3] Number 8 New Burlington Street, was Bentley's publishing address.

[4] Probably another reference to Bentley.

So the problem remains of who did write this review--one exceptional in its length, and evidently a kind of critical manifesto. Now the hypothesis that might perhaps be most reasonably advanced for the time being, is that a first draft of this review was probably by Fonblanque, and possibly by Forster; but that this was passed round among those concerned, and that it ended by being a composite work. In support of this hypothesis is the way that the review is written, as it were, in fits and starts. At one point, halfway through, it talks of coming to a conclusion, and then goes on at length. Further, it has lengthy footnotes appended to it. Both these signs are consistent with the possibility that more than one hand was involved with it, and it is certainly most unlike the usual reviews of fiction in the Examiner.

It is reasonable, therefore, to suggest that Dickens had at least some hand, or some say, in this review, as well as Forster and Fonblanque.[1] Thus it is probably the expression of a critical point of view which we know not only to have been shared but also held by three of its most important contributors.

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[1] Perhaps also even Leigh Hunt who had probably written the review of Nicholas Nickleby the previous week (See Appendix D).

# APPENDIX D

## ADDITIONAL NOTES ON THE ASCRIPTIONS OF SOME OF THE REVIEWS OF DICKENS'S FICTION IN THE "EXAMINER"

In this appendix, I have attempted to list (in note form) some of the more striking evidences of ascription for each of the reviews from 1836 to 1848.

As I have explained above (p. 209), it is not yet possible to be certain about the ascription of any of the reviews written between 1850 and 1855. Even the three longer accounts of David Copperfield, Bleak House, and Hard Times (see Bibliography) written in those years, not only seem to stand apart from others of Dickens in the journal, but they also seem to have no convincing connection with each other. It is possible that they were written by a person (or persons) other than Forster, Fonblanque, Hunt, and Morley, or that they were written jointly. In any case, it is clear that all of the notices written during those years require a more thorough examination before it may be possible to arrive at any conclusions about them.

The four major reviews written after 1855 may be reasonably ascribed to Henry Morley, since as I have pointed out above (pp. 203-8), there is a fairly consistent critical point of view and a distinctive writing style which links them together, and which compare convincingly with his own views and writings outside the Examiner.

For the sake of convenience, I have referred to each critic by the initial letter of his surname, the only exception being Fonblanque's which I have referred to as

"Fon". I have also made the assumption that anyone interested enough to make a full use of these notes will also have a copy of the review under question in front of him.

* * *

1. Sketches by Boz — 28 Feb 1836, 132-3

   Poss by Fon: Text above, pp. 185-7.

2. Pickwick 1 - 6 — 4 Sep 1836, 563-5

   Poss by Fon: Text above, pp. 185-7. Fon's characteristic brand of wit in ref to Daniel Lambert.

3. Pickwick 7 — 9 Oct 1836, 647-8

   Poss by Fon: Text above, pp. 185-7. Refs to Vanbrugh and Wycherley, satirical use of the archaic "flourisheth" and Latin expressions such as "ad unguem" not untypical of Fon.

4. Pickwick 8 — 6 Nov 1836, 710-11

   Poss by Fon: Text above, pp. 185-7. Ref to "turnpikes" a typical example of Fon's satirical wit.

5. Pickwick 9 — 4 Dec 1836, 775-6

   Prob by F : Text above, pp. 187-9. Comparison with Hogarth, characteristic of F. First sustained approval of D's truth to nature. "Exquisite", an adjective F uses quite frequently (caution: so do Hunt and Morley, who, however, were not yet reviewing D in the Exr.

6. Oliver Twist — 12 Mar 1837, 165-6

   Poss by F : F's concern with morality of Newgate fiction (caution: Fon also shared this concern). "Exquisite": see no. 5.

7. Pickwick 15 — 2 Jul 1837, 421-2

   Prob by F : Text above, pp. 187-9. Ref made to the address, which F helped him to write (Letters P, I, 274 and 277). Ref to "minute reality of a Defoe", a characteristic one for F. Style in general is that of F.

8. Oliver Twist — 10 Sep 1837, 581-2

Prob by F : Ref to "art of copying from nature", F's major concern with D's fiction at this time (see nos. 5 and 7). "Exquisite" (twice); see no. 5. style emphatically that of F.

9. Pickwick 19 & 20 — 5 Nov 1837, 708-9

Prob by F : Too slight and relatively commonplace to suppose that under normal circumstances at this time anyone other than the usual literary editor, F, would have written it.

10. Oliver Twist — 19 Nov 1837, 740-1

Prob by F : See no. 9. Also emphasis of "real life".

11. Sketches of Young Gentlemen — 4 Feb 1838, 68-9

Prob by F : See no. 9.

12. Memoirs of Joseph Grimaldi — 18 Mar 1838, 164

Poss by H or Fon : A reference in the review itself excludes the likelihood that F wrote it: "We had remembered its subject almost from his early maturity to his premature decay: he was mixed up with the pleasantest recollections of childhood, boyhood, and manhood." Grimaldi began his stage career in 1781 and retired in 1828, thus F (born 1812) could not have known of him in his early maturity, or have known of him during the three stages of his own life. Fon could--stretching the date of Grimaldi's "early maturity." The dates fit H more comfortably. No stylistic clues.

13. Nicholas Nickleby 1 — 1 Apr 1838, 195-6

? : Inconclusive.

14, 15, 16. Nicholas Nickleby 2, 3, 4 — 6 May 1838, 278; 3 Jun 1838, 339; 8 Jul 1838, 420

Poss by F : It might be thought that since these are all brief and fairly inconsequential notices (mostly extract), that F would have written them himself, since he was the literary reviewer. All three seem interrelated in that they each refer to

the balance in tone, though in slightly different terms. Thus, no. 14 refers to the "humour and pathos," the "comic and sorrowful," no. 15 refers to the element of "tragic-comedy," and no. 16 refers to the "affecting mixture of the ludicrous and terrible." But similar observations are also made in nos. 1, 4, and 6. The ascription of nos. 14, 15, and 16 remains uncertain therefore. It is likely that Forster wrote them, however, and that a recognition of the balance in tone was one of the views that he, Fon, and H, shared about D's early fiction. It was, after all, perhaps an obvious observation for anyone to make about D's early fiction.

17. Mudfog Assoc — 2 Sep 1838, 548-9

Poss by H or Fon : Chatty style (unlike F's usual style). The ref to "the great humorist of the day," seems to parallel "the first humourist of the day," in the notice of Memoirs of Joseph Grimaldi (no. 12), which is possibly by H or Fon. Reviewer's recognition of the ameliorating influence of D's writing "to the best interests of literature and humanity," suggests H.

18, 20, 21, 25.

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Nicholas Nickleby | 5 & 6 | 23 Sep 1838, 595-6 |
| Oliver Twist | | 18 Nov 1838, 723-5 |
| Oliver Twist | | 25 Nov 1838, 740-1 |
| Nicholas Nickleby | | 27 Oct 1839, 677-8 |

By H : Text above, pp. 190-7. These four reviews clearly stand together even on a superficial comparison. For example, in all four reviews H stresses the universal acceptance of D's fiction; in all four reviews he makes a specific point of observing that D's readers number in the thousands; in all four reviews he compares D to Fielding, and finally in all four, he is apologetic about his remarks. A closer consideration and comparison of all four is even more conclusive in their insistence on the beneficial, social and moral effects of Dickens's fiction.

19. Nicholas Nickleby (in ER) 7 Oct 1838, 628-9

By F : Pedestrian style. F predictably interested in the subject matter of the historical essays in that no. of the ER. Also, letter (D to F, 2 Oct 1838; Letters P, I, 438-9) suggests that F noticed that particular no. of the ER in the Exr because D drew his attention to the notice of his fiction, and told F how "delighted he had been with it."

20. Oliver Twist 18 Nov 1838, 723-5

By H : See no. 18.

21. Oliver Twist 25 Nov 1838, 740-1

By H : See no. 18.

22. Pickwick 16 Dec 1838, 790

? : The Latin might suggest Fon, as might the quib: "The head and shoulders of so odd a fish as Mr. Pickwick should not have been joined to a sentimental tail." The notice is too brief, however, for us to be conclusive. P/

23. Nicholas Nickleby 10 6 Jan 1839, 4

Poss by F : See no. 9.

24. Nicholas Nickleby 19 & 20 6 Oct 1839, 629-30

Poss by F : See no. 9.

25. Nicholas Nickleby 27 Oct 1839, 677-8

By H : See no. 18.

26. Sketches of Young Couples 16 Feb 1840, 100-1

By Fon or H : Element of fancy characteristic of Fon, as is the facetious reference to Conservative journals. The reference to the "racy style" and "rich humour" seems to look back to Fon's earliest notices of D's fiction. Yet, the style conceivably that of H.

27. Master Humphrey's Clock 12 Jul 1840, 435

Poss by F : See no. 9. Ref to "minute realities" of De Foe parallels that in no. 7, which is prob by F.

28. Oliver Twist — 25 Sep 1841, 614

Poss by F : See no. 9. Ref "we have urged the argument often" is a ref to general Examiner policy, rather than to F's reviews in particular. Nevertheless, this was an aspect of Newgate fiction that he constantly stressed, see Chapter 3, above.

29. Barnaby Rudge. Old Curiosity Shop — 4 Dec 1841, 772-4

By H. : Style and point of view convincingly so. This review obviously connected with no. 25 (by H): no. 25 refers to the "racy freshness of style," while this notice refers to the "fresh and racy" style; no. 25 remarks on the "faults of occasional exaggeration," while this notice observes that the "tendency to exaggerate is less;" no. 25 comments that he "occasionally overlays his thoughts with needless epithets." while this notice observes that his writing is "less padded out with useless epithet in matters of reflection." Once again, as in nos. 18, 20, 21, and 25, there is the same reluctance to find fault, and once again as in the other four notices, there is a comparison with Fielding (in the ref to Parson Adams).

30. American Notes — 29 Oct 1842, 692

By F or H : Reads like F in many places, yet expresses H's concern with D's sense of humanity. Possibly the result of discussion between them. Certainly if this can ever be shown to have been written by F, it would be a remarkably graphic instance of H's influence upon him.

31, 33, 34, 40.

| | |
|---|---|
| Christmas Carol | 23 Dec 1843, 804-5 |
| The Chimes | 21 Dec 1844, 803-5 |
| Cricket on the Hearth | 27 Dec 1845, 819-20 |
| The Haunted Man | 23 Dec 1848, 819-20 |

By H : Text above, pp. 197-203. These four reviews are clearly related. All of them (as in 18, 20, 21, and 25, all by H) stress D's universal acceptance; All of them emphasise the humanitarian purpose of D's Christmas writing— specifically stressing the notion of Christian charity and duty; nos. 31, 33, and 34, share a common conceit: thus, no. 31 observes that the Christmas of the Carol "must shine upon the cold hearth and warm it," no. 33 observes, that D "throws light

and warmth on the coldest and squalidest places," and no. 34 observes that "To say it is unnatural that the poor man's hearth should be lighted with these cheerful fancies . . . is little more than to say that we . . . are . . . unable to feel the light and warmth that we behold." The ideas of light and warmth, practical Christian charity, and the whole view of Christmas portrayed by D and noted (and no doubt initially inspired) by H in these notices, are convincingly paralled in his essay "Christmas Day" (See text, p. 202.n.1).

32. Martin Chuzzlewit — 26 Oct 1844, 675-7

By H : Opens with a characteristic observation ( of H's): "A writer who counts his readers by tens of thousands, has stolen a march upon his critics." (see nos. 18, 20, 21, 25, and 29; all by H). Style that of H. Point of view in general would also suggest H. If not H (which seems unlikely) then Fon would be the next most likely, but certainly not F.

33. The Chimes — 21 Dec 1844, 803-5

By H : See no. 31.

34. Cricket on the Hearth — 27 Dec 1845, 819-20

By H : See no. 31.

35. Pictures from Italy — 30 May 1846, 340-1

Poss by H : Seems to have been written by someone who (unlike F) was familiar with Italy. H was familiar with Italy, and had published "Letters from Abroad" a series of letters in The Liberal (1822-3) about his early impressions of the country. An allusion to D's thousands of readers is characteristic of H (see nos. 18, 20, 21, and 25). Also characteristic, the comparison with Fielding and Goldsmith (nos. 18 and 25). Style that of H.

36. Dombey and Son 3 — 28 Nov 1846, 756-7

Prob by F : See no. 9. Ref to "minute and exquisite observation," characteristic of F, see no. 7, also "comedy and pathos," see nos. 14, 15, and 16.

37. Battle of Life — 26 Dec 1846, 820-2

Prob by F : A straightforward notice in F's style. Seems to have no convincing connection with other notices of D's fiction in the Exr.

38. Christmas and D — 18 Dec 1847, 804

F or Fon : A straightforward notice, but interesting because it reiterates what H said about D in his review of The Chimes, only this time referring them to H himself, thus connecting H with the Christmas story reviews once again.

39. Dombey and Son — 28 Oct 1848, 692-3

By H : Ref to D's "tens of thousands" of readers characteristic of H, see nos. 18, 20, 21, 25, 31, 33, 34, 35, and 40. This review and no. 32 are connected: no. 32 comments that "A writer who counts his readers by tens of thousands, has stolen a march upon his critics. They toil after him very vainly. Not like the hound that hunts but one that fills up the cry, they are in the condition of Roderigo, and find no enjoyment in the chace." H comments in this review that "Criticism on a book so extensively known is necessarily at some disadvantage. "I do follow here in the chase," says Roderigo, "not like a hound that hunts, but one that fills up the cry." A similar almost apologetic stance is echoed in almost all of H's notices of D's works, see also nos. 18, 20, 21, 25, 29. Style that of H, and poetic awareness also seems to indicate H.

40. The Haunted Man — 23 Dec 1848, 819-20

By H : See no. 31.

# APPENDIX E

## NOTICES IN THE "EXAMINER" USED IN THE COMPILATION OF THE CRITICAL COMMENTS IN FORSTER'S "LIFE OF CHARLES DICKENS"

**The Pickwick Papers** (1837)

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| II, 1, 71-4 | 9 Oct 1836 | pp. 647-8 |
| | 2 Jul 1837 | 421-2 |
| | 1 Apr 1838 | 195-6 |
| | 16 Dec 1838 | 790 |

**Oliver Twist** (1838)

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| II, 2, 83 to 3, 92 | 10 Sep 1837 | pp. 581-2 |
| | 25 Nov 1838 | 740-1 |
| | 27 Oct 1839 | 677-8 |
| | 3 Nov 1839 | 691-3 |
| | 25 Sep 1841 | 614 |

**Nicholas Nickleby** (1839)

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| II, 4, 95-9 | 1 Apr 1838 | pp. 195-6 |
| | 3 Jun 1838 | 339 |
| | 8 Jul 1838 | 420 |
| | 23 Sep 1838 | 595-6 |
| | 27 Oct 1839 | 677-8 |

**The Old Curiosity Shop** (1841)

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| II, 7, 123-7 | 12 Jul 1840 | pp. 435 |
| | 4 Dec 1841 | 772-4 |

**Barnaby Rudge** (1841)

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| II, 9, 143-5 | 4 Dec 1841 | pp. 772-4 |

**American Notes** (1842)

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| III, 2, 176 to 8, 266, *passim* | 22 Oct 1842 | pp. 676-9 |

**A Christmas Carol** (1843)

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| IV, 2, 300-2 | 21 Dec 1844 | pp. 803-5 |
| | 27 Dec 1845 | 819-20 |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Martin Chuzzlewit (1844) | | |
| IV, 2, 292-8 | 26 Oct 1844 | pp. 675-7 |
| The Battle of Life (1846) | | |
| V, 6, 433-4 | 26 Dec 1846 | pp. 820-2 |
| Dombey and Son (1848) | | |
| VI, 2, 19-35, passim | 28 Oct 1848 | pp. 692-3 |
| The Haunted Man (1848) | | |
| VI, 4, 59-61 | 23 Dec 1848 | pp. 819-20 |
| David Copperfield (1850) | | |
| VI, 7, 98-109, passim | 14 Dec 1850 | pp. 798-9 |
| Bleak House (1853) | | |
| VII, 1, 113-9 | 8 Oct 1853 | pp. 643-5 |
| Hard Times (1854) | | |
| VII, 1, 120-1 | 9 Sep 1854 | pp. 568-9 |
| Little Dorrit (1857) | | |
| VIII, 1, 181-95, passim | 13 Jun 1857 | p. 372 |
| Our Mutual Friend (1865) | | |
| IX, 5, 294-5 | 28 Oct 1865 | pp. 681-2 |

## Appendix F

### ACCOUNTS OF 'OLIVER TWIST' AND 'NICHOLAS NICKLEBY' FROM 'THE LIFE OF CHARLES DICKENS' BY JOHN FORSTER, ILLUSTRATED BY SOME OF THE SOURCES FROM WHICH THEY WERE COMPILED

An account of some of the conclusions to be drawn from a comparison of the two different accounts of Oliver Twist and Nicholas Nickleby, is to be found in the last chapter of this thesis. This appendix only attempts to set out the Life accounts in full, together with as many of the original sources that Forster used, as I have been able to trace.'

I have tried to set out the two Life accounts in such a way as to make a comparison with their source material (mostly from the Examiner) as easy and graphic as possible. Further, since the notices from which most of the extracts are taken are already listed in full in Appendix E, for the sake of simplicity, I have referred to them here by date only. I have also indicated the column (of a notice in the Examiner itself) in which an extract may be found.

## OLIVER TWIST
## (Life, II, 2, 83 to 3, 92)

Here was the interest of a story simply but well constructed; and characters with the same impress of reality upon them, but more carefully and skillfully drawn. Nothing could be meaner than the subject, the progress of a parish or workhouse boy, nothing less so than its treatment. As each number appeared, his readers generally became more and more conscious of what already, as we have seen, had revealed itself and even the riotous fun of Pickwick, that the purpose was not solely to amuse; and, far more decisively than its predecessor, the new story further showed what were the not least potent elements in the still-increasing popularity that was gathering around the writer. His qualities could be appreciated as well as felt in an almost equal degree by all classes of his various readers. Thousands were attracted to him, because he placed them in the midst of scenes and characters with which they were already themselves acquainted; and thousands were reading him with no less avidity because he introduced them to passages of nature and life of which they before knew nothing, but of the truth of which their own habits and senses sufficed to assure them. Only to genius are so revealed the affinities and sympathies of high and low, in regard to the customs and usages of life; and only a writer of the first rank can bear the application of such a test. For it is by the alliance of common habits, quite as much as by the bonds of a common humanity, that we are all of us linked together; and the result of being above the necessity of depending on other

people's opinions, and that of being below it, are pretty much the same. It would equally startle both high and low to be conscious of the whole that is implied in this close approximation[1]. . . . . .

. . . . . .

---

[1]Now by all the various readers of this tale of Nicholas Nickleby--and they separate themselves into classes most widely apart from each other--these various qualities can be in an almost equal degree appreciated and felt. In this we advance further into the causes of so remarkable a popularity. Thousands read the book because it places them in the midst of scenes and characters with which they are already themselves acquainted; and thousands read it with no less avidity because it introduces them to passages of nature and life of which they before knew nothing, but of the truth of which their own habits and senses suffice to assure them. This is a test which only a man of genius could bear. It is only in the presence of a writer of genius that the affinities and sympathies of high and low, in regard to the customs and usages of life, are so revealed. For it is not more by the bonds of a common humanity, than by the alliances of common habits, that we are all linked together. The highest and the lowest in these respects most nearly approximate to each other. Like effects must always more or less result from being either above or below a dependence on other people's opinions.

The completed Oliver Twist found a cirlce of admirers, not so wide in its range as those of others of his books, but of a character and mark that made their honest liking for it, and steady advocacy of it, important to his fame; and the story has held its ground in the first class of his writings. It deserves that place. The admitted exaggerations in Pickwick are incident to its club's extravaganza of adventure of which they are part, and are easily separable from the reality of its wit and humour, and its incomparable freshness; but no such allowances were needed here. Make what deduction the too scrupulous reader of Oliver might please for "lowness" in the subject, the precision and the unexaggerated force of the delineation were not to be disputed. The art of copying from nature as it really exists in the common walks had not been carried by anyone to greater perfection, or to better results in the way of combination.[1] Such was his handling of the

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[1]The art of copying from nature as it really exists in the common walks of life has not been carried to greater perfection, or to finer results in the way of combination, by the most eminent writers. We have heard it objected to the Pickwick Papers that they are now and then extravagant, and certainly, in spite of the reality of their wit and humour, the sort of extravaganza of adventure they are founded on warrants the objection . . . The scrupulous reader may make what deductions he pleases for the "lowness" of the subject-- the absolute truth and precision of its

piece of solid, existing, everyday life, which he made here the groundwork of his wit and tenderness,[1] that the book which did much to help out of the world the social evils it portrayed, will probably preserve longest the picture of them as they then were. Thus far indeed he had written nothing to which in greater or less degree this felicity did not belong. At the time of which I am speaking, the debtor's prison described in Pickwick, the parochial management denounced in Oliver, and the Yorkshire schools exposed in Nickleby, were all actual existences; which now have no vivider existence than in the forms he thus gave to them. With wiser purposes, he superseded the old petrifying process of the magician in the Arabian tale, and struck the prisons and parish practices of his country, and its schools of neglect and crime, into palpable life for ever. A portion of the truth of the past, of the character and very history of the moral abuses of his time, will thus remain always in his writings; and it will be remembered that with only the light arms of humour and laughter, and the gentle ones of pathos and sadness, he carried cleansing and reform into those Augean stables.[2]

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delineation are not to be disputed. (Exr 10 Sep 37, Col.1)

[1]He has . . . solid, existing, every-day life for the groundwork of his enduring wit and tenderness. . . .
(Exr 25 Nov 38, Col.1)

[2]Who, like him, ever promised to bring reforms into the Augean stables of mercenary schools and prisons and work-houses, by the apparently light arms of humour and the

Not that such intentions are in any degree ever intruded by this least didactic of writers. It is the fact that teaches, and not any sermonising drawn from it. Oliver Twist is the history of a child born in a workhouse and brought up by parish overseers, and there is nothing introduced that is out of keeping with the design. It is a series of pictures from the tragic-comedy of lower life, worked out by perfectly natural agencies, from the dying mother and the starved wretches of the first volume, through the scenes and graduations of crime, careless or deliberate, which have a frightful consummation in the last volume, but are never without the reliefs and self-assertions of humanity even in scenes and among characters so debased.[1] It is indeed the primary purpose of the tale

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gentle ones of pathos? by shaking the air around them with bursts of laughter, and purifying it with the uncanting tears of the very criminals themselves? . . . He . . . superseded the old petrifying process of the magician in the Arabian tale, and struck the prisons and parish government of his country into palpable life for ever. . . . Still in other times than ours they will be read and referred to with profit and delight, as a portion of the absolute truth of the past, and of the very history, as it were, of the character and moral abuses of our time.

(Exr 25 Nov 38, Col. 1)

[1]Our concluding extract shall be a portion of the scene at "Folly Ditch," which expresses . . . some of the most beautiful reliefs and self-assertions of humanity

to show its little hero, jostled as he is in the miserable crowd, preserved everywhere from the vice of its pollution by an exquisite delicacy of natural sentiment which clings to him under every disadvantage. There is not a more masterly touch in fiction (and it is by such that this delightful fancy is consistently worked out to the last) than Oliver's agony of childish grief on being brought away from the branch workhouse, the wretched home associated only with suffering and starvation, and with no kind word or look, but containing still his little companions in misery.[1]

Of the figures the book has made familiar to everyone it is not my purpose to speak. To name one or two will be enough. Bumble and his wife; Charley Bates and the Artful Dodger; the cowardly charity boy, Noah Claypole, whose Such agony please sir puts a school-life into a single

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even in scenes and among characters so debased.

(Exr 25 Nov 38, Col. 4)

[1]. . . better than all is the exquisite delicacy of natural sentiment , which, in spite of every disadvantage, clings to Oliver himself, and, jostled as he is in this miserable crowd, preserves him from the vice of its pollution. This is beautifully imagined, and is executed in a few of those masterly touches which hit the very springs of nature. We see it where Bumble brings him away from the branch workhouse, when an agony of childish grief breaks from him on leaving the wretched home where he had met with no kind word or look, but which still contains his little companions in misery. . . . (Exr 10 Sep 37, Col. 2)

phrase;[1] the so-called merry old Jew, supple and black-hearted Fagin; and Bill Sikes, the bolder-faced bulky-legged ruffian, with his white hat and white shaggy dog,[2] -- who does not know them all, even to the least points of dress, look and walk, and all the small peculiarities that express great points of character? I have omitted poor wretched Nancy; yet it is to be said of her, with such honest truthfulness her strength and weakness are shown, in the virtue that lies neighboured in her nature so closely by vice, that the people meant to be entirely virtuous show poorly beside her. But, though Rose and her lover are trivial enough beside Bill and his mistress, being indeed the weak part of the story, it is the book's pre-eminent merit that vice is nowhere made attractive in it.[3] Crime is not more intensely odious, all through, than it is also

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[1] . . . and the Cowardly Charity Boy with his "such agony please sir" (there is a whole school-life in that single phrase). (Exr 25 Nov 38, Col. 2)

[2] Principal among these are the merry old Jew, a supple and blackhearted villain . . . . and Bill, a bold-faced ruffianly brute, with his white hat and white shaggy dog. (Exr 10 Sep 37, Col. 3)

[3] . . . the somewhat trivial creations of Rose and Harry Maylie. We think that episode, in short, a failure. Contrast it, for instance, with the virtuous and beautiful part of that startling, nobly wrought, and impassioned picture of Sikes's mistress-- of whose mixture of actual and great virtue with her vice we are more certain than we feel

most unhappy. Not merely when its exposure comes, when guilt's latent recesses are laid bare, and the agonies of remorse are witnessed; not in the great scenes only, but in lighter and apparently careless passages; this is emphatically so. Terror and retribution dog closely at the heels both of the comedy and the tragedy of crime. They are as plainly visible when Fagin is first shown in his den, boiling the coffee in the saucepan and stopping every now and then to listen when there is the least noise below, --the villainous confidence of habit never extinguishing in him the anxious watchings and listenings of crime,[1] --as when we see him at the last in the

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we could predicate of the more dispassionate considerateness of soft Rose Maylie under the like circumstances.

(Exr 25 Nov 38, Col. 3)

[1] . . . the very character itself in its most latent recesses, in its veriest internal workings, which is laid open and bare before us. . . . it is obvious even in the lighter passages of the book, and where the apparently careless hand of the author would seem to have aimed at no such effect. Take, for instance, the slight portrait of the Jew on the morning after little Oliver's introduction to his den. The villainous confidence of habit does not extinguish the anxious watches and listenings of crime--

> "There was no other person in the room but the old Jew who was boiling some coffee in a saucepan for breakfast, and whistling softly to himself as he stirred it round and round with an iron spoon. He would stop every now and then to listen when there was the least noise below; and, when he had satisfied himself, he would go on whistling and stirring again as before."
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> (Exr 25 Nov 38, Col. 2)

condemned cell, like a poisoned human rat in a hole.[1]

A word may be added upon the attacks directed against the subject of the book, to which Dickens made reply in one of his later editions; declaring his belief that he had tried to do a service to society, and had certainly done no disservice, in depicting a knot of such associates in crime in all their deformity and squalid wretchedness, skulking uneasily through a miserable life to a painful and shameful death.[2] It is indeed never the subject that can be objectionable, if the treatment is not so, as we may see by much popular writing since, where subjects unimpeachably high are brought low by degrading sensualism. When the object of a writer is to exhibit the vulgarity of vice, and not its pretensions to heroism or cravings for sympathy, he may measure his subject with the highest. Swindlers and thieves are our associates. In Gil Blas; we shake hands with highwaymen and housebreakers all round in the Beggars' Opera; we pack cards with La Ruse or pick

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[1] . . . in the condemned cell, like a poisoned human rat. Exr 25 Nov 38, Col. 2)

[2] It appeared to me that to draw a knot of such associates in crime as really do exist; to paint them in all their deformity, in all their wretchedness, in all the squalid poverty of their lives; to show them as they really are, for ever skulking uneasily through the dirtiest paths of life, with the great, black, ghastly gallows closing up their prospect, turn them where they may; it appeared to me that to do this, would be to attempt a something which was

pockets with Jonathon in Fielding's Mr. Wild the Great; cruelty and vice attend us in the prints of Hogarth; but our morals stand none the looser for any of them. As the spirit of the Frenchman was pure enjoyment, the strength of the Englishmen lay in wisdom and satire. The low was set forth to pull down the false pretensions of the high. They differ in design from Dickens, because they desire less to discover the soul of goodness in things evil than to brand the stamp of evil on things apt to pass for good, but their objects and results are substantially the same. Familiar with the lowest kind of abasement of life, the knowledge is used, by both him and them, to teach what constitutes its essential elevation; and, by the very coarseness and vulgarity of the materials employed, we measure the gentlemanliness and beauty of the work that is done. The quack in morality will always call such writing immoral, and the imposters will continue to complain of its treatment of imposture; but for the rest of the world it will teach still the invaluable lesson of what men ought to be from what they are. We cannot learn it more than enough. We cannot too often be told that, as the pride and grandeur of mere external circumstances is the falsest of earthly things, so the truth of virtue in the heart is the most lovely and lasting; and from the pages of Oliver Twist this teaching is once again to be taken by

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greatly needed, and which would be a service to society.

(Preface, Third Edn., O.T.)

all who will look for it there.[1]

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[1]For it is not the title, even though it be Jack Sheppard, that should warn good taste from such a book. It is the uses to which it is applied. It is not the subject we shrink from; the treatment is the paramount objection. We meet with a succession of swindlers and theieves in Gil Blas; we shake hands with highwaymen and housebreakers all round in the Beggars' Opera; we pack cards with La Ruse or pick pockets with Jonathon in Fielding's Mr. Wild the Great; we follow vice from its least beginnings to its grossest ends in the plates of Hogarth; but for all that our morals stand none the looser. After such men as these, crawling and deliberate Vice limps lazily along. It may now and then indeed, conceiving them to have paid homage to itself, attempt to thrust forward its hideous mien, but as soon is it spurned back again for its pains. As the spirit of the Frenchmen was pure enjoyment, that of the Englishmen lay in wisdom and satire. . . . It was not so much that they sought to discover the soul of goodness in things evil, as to brand the stamp of evil upon things the world was apt to think good. Familiar indeed with the abasement of life, they used that knowledge only to preach its essential refinement and truest elevation. In exact proportions to the vulgarity or coarseness of the materials they used, was the exquisite gentlemanliness and beauty of the work they achieved. All their tendencies were to the good and generous side. As the pride and grandeur of mere external circumstance is the falsest and

most dangerous of all earthly things, so the truth of virtue in the heart is of all the most lovely and the most lasting: and these great men, by laying bare the one, truly thought that they could best promote the other. By cheating the common ideas of people of the illusions of prejudice and the world, they properly supposed that they might best prepare them for the reception of what was least worldly or selfish and most just. The quack in morality had always called them immoral, and the imposters of life have naturally complained of their revelation of the grandest of all imposture; but for the rest of the world the invaluable lesson has been taught for ever in their immortal works, of what man ought to be from what men are.

(Exr 3 Nov 39, Col.1)

## NICHOLAS NICKLEBY
## (Life, II, 4, 95-9)

I well recollect the doubt there was, mixed with the eager expectation which the announcement of his second serial story had awakened, whether the event would justify all that interest; and if indeed it were possible that the young writer could continue to walk steadily under the burthen of the popularity laid upon him. The first number dispersed this cloud of a question in a burst of sunshine; and as much of the gaiety of nations as had been eclipsed by old Mr. Pickwick's voluntary exile to Dulwich was restored by the cheerful confidence with which young Mr. Nicholas Nickleby stepped into his shoes.[1] Everything that had given charm to the first book was here, with more attention to the important requisite of a story, and more wealth was well as truth of character.

How this was poured forth in each successive number, it hardly needs that I should tell. To recall it now is to talk of what since has so interwoven itself with common speech and thought, as to have become almost part of the daily life of us all. It was well said of him, soon after his death, in mentioning how largely his compositions had

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[1]We cannot let the first number of a work which, will break in upon thousands and tens of thousands of readers like a burst of sunshine, pass without a few words of heartiest welcome. The "gaiety of nations" was eclipsed by old Mr. Pickwick's voluntary exile to Dulwich-- but it will be restored by the easy and confident air with which young Mr. Nicholas Nickleby steps into his shoes. (Exr 1 Apr 38,Col.1)

furnished one of the chief sources of intellectual enjoyment to this generation, that his language had become part of the language of every class and rank of his countrymen, and his characters were a portion of our contemporaries. "It seems scarcely possible," continued this otherwise not too indulgent commentator, "to believe that there never were any such persons as Mr. Pickwick and Mrs. Nickleby and Mrs. Gamp. They are to us not only types of English life, but types actually existing. They at once revealed the existence of such people, and made them thoroughly comprehensible. They were not studies of persons, but persons. And yet they were idealised in the sense that the reader did not think that they were drawn from the life. They were alive; they were themselves."[1] The writer

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[1] . . . whose compositions have furnished one of the chief sources of intellectual wealth to this generation. The language of Mr. DICKENS has become part of the language of every class and rank of his countrymen. The characters of Mr. DICKENS are a portion of our contemporaries. It seems scarcely possible to believe that there never were any such persons as Mr. PICKWICK and Mrs. NICKLEBY and Mrs. GAMP. They are to us not only types of English life, but types actually existing. They at once revealed the existence of such people, and made them thoroughly comprehensible. They were not studies of persons, but persons. And yet they were idealized in the sense that the reader did not think that they were drawn from the life. They were alive; they were themselves.

(Saturday Review 11 Jun 70, xxix, 760)

might have added that this is proper to all true masters of fiction who work in the higher regions of their calling.

Nothing certainly could express better what the new book was at this time making manifest to its thousands of readers; not simply an astonishing variety in the creations of character, but what it was that made these creations so real; not merely the writer's wealth of genius, but the secret and form of his art. There never was anyone who had less need to talk about his characters, because never were characters so surely revealed by themselves; and it was thus their reality made itself felt at once. They talked so well that everybody took to repeating what they said, as the writer just quoted has pointed out; and the sayings being the constituent elements of the characters, these also of themselves became part of the public. This, which must always be a novelist's achievement, was the art carried to exquisite perfection on a more limited stage by Miss Austen; and, under widely different conditions both of art and work, it was pre-eminently that of Dickens. I told him, on reading the first dialogue of Mrs. Nickleby and Miss Knag, that he had been lately reading Miss Bates in Emma, but I found that he had not at this time made the acquaintance of that fine writer.

Who that recollects the numbers of Nickleby as they appeared can have forgotten how each number added to the general enjoyment? All that had given Pickwick its vast popularity, the overflowing mirth, hearty exuberance of humour, and genial kindliness of satire, had here the advantage of a better-laid design, more connected incidents,

and greater precision of character,[1] Everybody seemed immediately to know the Nickleby family as well as his own. Dotheboys, with all that rendered it, like a piece by Hogarth,[2] both ludicrous and terrible,[3] became a household word. Successive groups of Mantalinis, Kenwigses, Crummlesses, introduced each its little world of reality lighted up everywhere with truth and life, with capital observation, the quaintest drollery, and quite boundless mirth and fun. The brothers Cheeryble brought with them all the charities. With Smike came the first of those pathetic pictures that filled the world with pity for what cruelty, ignorance or neglect may inflict upon the young.

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[1]We think that we perceive, in the opening chapters of this new romance of comedy, the same spirit of enjoyment; the same affectionate heartiness of tone; the same liberal, exuberant, unrestrained vein of humour; that gave sudden and vast popularity to the Pickwick Papers—with the addition of even better promise on the score of a well-laid design, and of greater truth and precision of character. (Exr 1 Apr 38, Col. 1)

[2]We are here introduced to the "Internal Economy of Dotheboys Hall." It is given in that powerful style of tragi-comedy, of which it is at once the best description and the highest praise to say that it strongly resembles Hogarth. (Exr 3 Jun 38, Col. 1)

[3]The series of atrocities which induce this [Nicholas's beating Squeers] are given in the author's best manner—with that careless and most affecting mixture of the

And Newman Noggs ushered in that class of the creatures of his fancy in which he took himself perhaps the most delight, and which the oftener he dealt with the more he seemed to know how to vary and render attractive; gentlemen by nature, however shocking bad their hats or ungenteel their dialects; philosophers of modest endurance, and needy but most respectable coats; a sort of humble angels of sympathy and self-denial, though without a particle of splendour or even good looks about them, except what an eye as fine as their own feelings might discern. "My friends," wrote Sydney Smith, describing to Dickens the anxiety of some ladies of his acquaintance to meet him at dinner, "have not the smallest objection to be put into a number, but on the contrary would be proud of the distinction; and Lady Charlotte, in particular, you may marry to Newman Noggs."[1] Lady Charlotte was not a more real person to Sydney than Newman Noggs; and all the world whom Dickens attracted to his books could draw from them the same advantage as the man of wit and genius. It

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ludicrous and terrible. . . .

(Exr 8 Jul 38, Col. 1)

[1]The Miss Berrys and Lady Charlotte Lindsay have not the smallest objection to be put into a Number, but on the contrary, would be proud of the distinction; and Lady Charlotte, in particular, you may marry to Newman Noggs.

(Sydney Smith to Dickens, 11 June 39; Letters, I, 686-7.)

has been lately objected that humanity is not seen in them in its highest or noblest types,[1] and the assertion may hereafter be worth considering; but what is very certain is, that they have inculcated humanity in familiar and engaging forms to thousands and tens of thousands of their readers,[2] who can hardly have failed each to make his little world around him somewhat the better for their teaching. From first to last they were never for a moment alien to either the sympathies or the understandings of any class; and there were crowds of people at this time that could not have told you what imagination meant, who were adding month by month to their limited stores the boundless gains of imagination.

One other kindliest product of humour in Nickleby not to be passed over in even thus briefly recalling a few first impressions of it, was the good little miniature-painter Miss LaCreevy, living by herself, overflowing with affections she has no one to enrich by, but always cheerful by dint of industry and good-heartedness. When she is disappointed in the character of a woman she has been to

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[1]Only the cultivated . . . paused to consider the pervading commonness of the works, and remarked that they are wholly without glimpses of a nobler life. . . .

(G. H. Lewes, "Dickens in Relation to Criticism," Fortnightly Review, Feb 72)

[2]. . . the first number . . . will break in upon thousands and tens of thousands of readers like a burst of sunshine . . . .

(Exr 1 Apr 38, Col. 1)

see, she eases her mind by saying a very cutting thing at her expense in a soliloquy: and thereby illustrates one of the advantages of having lived alone so long, that she always made a confidante of herself; was as sarcastic as she could be, by herself, on people who offended her; pleased herself, and did no harm. Here was one of those touches, made afterwards familiar to the readers of Dickens by inumerable similar fancies, which added affection to their admiration for the writer, and enabled them to anticipate the feeling with which the posterity would regard him as indeed the worthy companion of the Goldsmiths and Fieldings.[1] There was a piece of writing, too, within not

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[1]We shall conclude with laying before the reader a delightful passage from the last number, relating to Miss La Creevy. Miss La Creevy, we need scarcely tell anybody, is a fair and most worthy miniature painter, living by herself, overflowing with affections which she has nobody to bestow on, but cheerful by dint of industry and good-heartedness. She has just been disappointed in the character of a woman she has been to see, and has eased her mind by saying a very cutting thing at her expense in a soliloquy. "Here," says Mr. Dickens—

> Here was one of the advantages of having lived alone so long. The little bustling, active, cheerful creature, existed entirely within herself, talked to herself, made a confident of herself, was as sarcastic as she could be, on people who offended her, by herself; pleased herself, and did no harm. . . .

Now this is one of those cheerful, good-hearted passages which, as well as those many others in which Mr.

many pages of it, of which Leigh Hunt exclaimed on reading it that it surpassed the best things of the kind in Smollet that he was able to call to mind. This was the letter of Miss Squeers to Ralph Nickleby, giving him her version of the chastisement inflicted by Nicholas on the schoolmaster. "My pa requests me to write to you, the doctors considering it doubtful whether he will ever recuvver the use of his legs which prevents his holding a pen. We are in a state of mind beyond everything, and my pa is one mask of brooses both blue and green likewise two forms are steepled in his Goar. . . . Me and my brother were then the victims of his feury since which we have suffered very much which leads us to the arrowing belief that we have received some injury in our insides, especially as no marks of violence are visible externally. I am screaming out loud all the time I write and so is my brother which takes off my attention rather and I hope will excuse mistakes. . . ."[1]

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Dickens shows a zeal for the social and plitical welfare of his fellow-creatures--add affection for him to our admiration, and enable us to anticipate the feelings with which posterity shall regard him as the indeed worthy companion of the GOLDSMITHS and FIELDINGS.

(Exr 23 Sep 38, Col. 5)

[1]. . . it is impossible to pass over the letter from Miss Squeers to the uncle. . . . The following is the greater portion, and equals the best things of the kind in Smollett;-- nay, surpasses any that we can call to mind. . . . [Letter follows]. (Exr 23 Sep 38, Col. 3)

Thus rapidly may be indicated some elements that contributed to the sudden and astonishingly wide popularity of these books. I purposely reserve from my present notices of them, which are biographical rather than critical, any statement of the reasons for which I think them inferior in my imagination and fancy to some of the later works; but there was increasing and steady growth in them on the side of humour, observation and character, while freshness and raciness of style continued to be an important help. There are faults of occasional exaggeration in the writing, but none that do not spring from animal spirits and good humour, or a pardonable excess, here and there, on the side of earnestness; and it has the rare virtue, whether gay or grave, of being always thoroughly intelligible and for the most part thoroughly natural, of suiting itself without effort to every change of mood, as quick, warm and comprehensive as the sympathies it is taxed to express. The tone also is excellent. We are never repelled by egotism or conceit, and misplaced ridicule never disgusts us. When good is going on, we are sure to see all the beauty of it; and when there is evil, we are in no danger of mistaking it for good. No one can paint more picturesquely by an apposite epithet, or illustrate more happily by a choice allusion. Whatever he knows or feels, too, is always at his finger's ends, and is present through whatever he is doing.[1]

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[1]We are never repelled by the abominations of egotism, conceit, or dogmatism. We are never disgusted by misplaced

What Rebecca says to Ivanhoe of the black knight's mode of fighting would not be wholly inapplicable to Dickens's manner of writing. "There is more than mere strength, there seems as if the whole soul and spirit of the champion were given to every blow he deals."[1] This when a man

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ridicule. If there is good going on, there is a vivid and hearty style to bring out all its beauty; and if there is evil, it runs no chance of being mistaken for good. . .

. . . . . .

. . . Bating some faults of occasional exaggeration, which we may presently advert to, it is fresh and racy, and has the surpassing charms of simplicity, earnestness, animal spirits, and good humour. A rare virtue in it is, that it is always, whether grave or gay, thoroughly intelligible, and for the most part thoroughly natural. Its sparkling stream of vivacity or humour glides down by the easiest transition into deeper currents of seriousness and pathos. It is as quick, as comprehensive, as the sympathies it is taxed to express. We know of none that can paint more powerfully by an apposite epithet, or illustrate more happily by a choice allusion. Whatever Mr. Dickens knows or feels, too, is always at his fingers' ends. . . . It is present with him through every passage of his book.

(Exr 27 Oct 39, Col. 1)

[1]There is more than mere strength; there seems as if the whole soul and spirit of the champion were given to every blow which he deals upon his enemies.

(Scott, Ivanhoe, Chap 29)

deals his blows with a pen, is the sort of handling that freshens with new life the oldest facts, and breathes into thoughts the most familiar an emotion not felt before. There seemed to be not much to add to our knowledge of London until his books came upon us, but each in this respect outstripped the other in its marvels. In Nickleby the old city reappears under every aspect; and whether warmth and light are playing over what is good and cheerful in it, or the veil is uplifted from its darker scenes, it is at all times our privilege to see and feel it as it absolutely is. Its interior hidden life becomes familiar as its commonest outward forms, and we discover that we hardly knew anything of the places we supposed that we knew the best.[1]

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[1] Who that has read his descriptions of the various localities of London . . . can ever expect to forget them more? A fresh glow of warmth and light plays over the cheerful and familiar places, a deeper mist of misery and blackness settles on the darker scenes. . . . [There follows mention of a number of examples] . . . . . At all times, and under every aspect, he gives us to feel and see the great city as it absolutely is. Its interior life is made as familiar to us as its exterior forms. We come to know better the very places we have known best.

(Exr 27 Oct 39, Col. 2)

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II

This list of the notices of the fiction of Edward Bulwer-Lytton, William Carleton, Charles Dickens, Benjamin Disraeli, Elizabeth Gaskell, Charles Kingsley, Harriet Martineau, and William Thackeray, is limited to those in the Examiner between 1833 and 1855-- with the exception of those of Dickens, which have been listed up to 1865. This section of the bibliography makes no claim to be definitive.

## EDWARD BULWER-LYTTON

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| **1833** | | |
| Godolphin | 19 May, | 309 |
| **1834** | | |
| Last Days of Pompeii | 26 Oct, | 676-7 |
| **1835** | | |
| Pelham | 18 Jan, | 35 |
| The Disowned | 2 Aug, | 484 |
| Rienzi | 13 Dec, | 788-9 |
| **1837** | | |
| Ernest Maltravers | 24 Sep, | 612-5 |
| **1838** | | |
| Alice | 25 Mar, | 179-80 |
| Leila | 20 May, | 308-9 |
| **1840** | | |
| Rienzi and Ernest Maltravers | 8 Mar, | 150 |
| Ernest Maltravers | 22 Mar, | 182 |
| Godolphin | 10 May, | 292 |
| Paul Clifford | 30 Aug, | 550 |
| **1841** | | |
| Night and Morning | 17 Jan, | 35-7 |
| General Critical Comments | 20 Nov, | 738-9 |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| **1842** | | |
| Zanoni | 26 Feb, | 132-3 |
| **1843** | | |
| Last of the Barons | 11 Mar, | 148-9 |
| Last of the Barons | 10 Jun, | 356-7 |
| **1846** | | |
| Lucretia | 5 Dec, | 771-3 |
| Lucretia | 12 Dec, | 788 |
| **1847** | | |
| General Critical Comments | 30 Jan, | 66-7 |
| **1848** | | |
| Harold | 17 Jun, | 388-90 |
| **1849** | | |
| The Caxtons | 20 Oct, | 659-61 |
| **1850** | | |
| My Novel | 5 Oct, | 639 |
| **1851** | | |
| My Novel | 1 Feb, | 69-70 |
| **1853** | | |
| My Novel | 26 Feb, | 132-4 |

## WILLIAM CARLETON

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| **1842** | | |
| Traits and Stories of Irish Peasantry | 3 Sep, | 565 |
| **1845** | | |
| Valentine M'Clutchy | 18 Jan, | 35-6 |
| Rody the Rover | 18 Oct, | 659-60 |

1848

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| The Emigrants of Ahadarra | 22 Jan, | 51 |

## CHARLES DICKENS

1836

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Sketches by Boz | 28 Feb, | 132-3 |
| Pickwick 1 - 6 | 4 Sep, | 563-5 |
| Pickwick 7 | 9 Oct, | 647-8 |
| Pickwick 8 | 6 Nov, | 710-11 |
| Pickwick 9 | 4 Dec, | 775-6 |

1837

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Oliver Twist | 12 Mar, | 165-6 |
| Pickwick 15 | 2 Jul, | 421-2 |
| Oliver Twist | 10 Sep, | 581-2 |
| Pickwick | 1 Oct, | 627 |
| Pickwick | 8 Oct, | 650 |
| Pickwick 19 & 20 | 5 Nov, | 708-9 |
| Oliver Twist | 19 Nov, | 740-1 |

1838

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Sketches of Young Gentlemen | 4 Feb, | 68-9 |
| Memoirs of Grimaldi | 18 Mar, | 164 |
| Nicholas Nickleby 1 | 1 Apr, | 195-6 |
| Nicholas Nickleby 2 | 6 May, | 278 |
| Nicholas Nickleby 3 | 3 Jun, | 339 |
| Nicholas Nickleby 4 | 8 Jul, | 420 |
| Mudfrog Assoc | 2 Sep, | 548-9 |
| Nicholas Nickleby 5 & 6 | 23 Sep, | 595-6 |
| Nicholas Nickleby (in ER) | 7 Oct, | 628-9 |
| Oliver Twist | 18 Nov, | 723-5 |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Oliver Twist | 25 Nov, | 740-1 |
| Pickwick (French crit of) | 16 Dec, | 790 |
| **1839** | | |
| Nicholas Nickleby 10 | 6 Jan, | 4 |
| Nicholas Nickleby, Conclusion | 6 Oct, | 629-30 |
| Nicholas Nickleby | 27 Oct, | 677-8 |
| **1840** | | |
| Sketches of Young Couples | 16 Feb, | 100-1 |
| Master Humphrey's Clock | 12 Jul, | 435 |
| **1841** | | |
| Oliver Twist | 25 Sep, | 614 |
| Barnaby Rudge, Old Curiosity Shop | 4 Dec, | 772-4 |
| **1842** | | |
| American Notes | 22 Oct, | 676-9 |
| American Notes | 29 Oct, | 692 |
| **1843** | | |
| Christmas Carol | 23 Dec, | 804-5 |
| **1844** | | |
| Martin Chuzzlewit | 26 Oct, | 675-7 |
| The Chimes | 21 Dec, | 803-5 |
| **1845** | | |
| Cricket on the Hearth | 27 Dec, | 819-20 |
| **1846** | | |
| Pictures from Italy | 30 May, | 340-1 |
| Dombey and Son 3 | 28 Nov, | 757-8 |
| Battle of Life | 26 Dec, | 820-2 |
| **1847** | | |
| Christmas & D | 18 Dec, | 804 |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| **1848** | | |
| Dombey and Son | 28 Oct, | 692-3 |
| The Haunted Man | 23 Dec, | 819-20 |
| **1850** | | |
| David Copperfield | 14 Dec, | 798-9 |
| **1851** | | |
| "To Be Read at Dusk" | 22 Nov, | 741 |
| **1852** | | |
| Bleak House | 6 Mar, | 150 |
| Round of Stories | 18 Dec, | 805 |
| **1853** | | |
| Bleak House | 8 Oct, | 643-5 |
| Another Round of Stories | 24 Dec, | 819 |
| **1854** | | |
| General Critical Comments | 8 Jul, | 426 |
| Hard Times | 9 Sep, | 568-9 |
| The Seven Poor Travellers | 16 Dec, | 796-7 |
| **1855** | | |
| The Holly Tree Inn | 22 Dec, | 805 |
| **1857** | | |
| Little Dorrit | 13 Jun, | 372 |
| "Perils of Certain English Prisoners . . ." | 5 Dec, | 772-3 |
| **1859** | | |
| A Tale of Two Cities | 10 Dec, | 788-9 |
| **1861** | | |
| Great Expectations | 20 Jul, | 452-3 |
| "Tom Tiddler's Ground" | 11 Dec, | 393 |
| **1865** | | |
| Our Mutual Friend | 28 Oct, | 681-2 |

## BENJAMIN DISRAELI

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| **1833** | | |
| Alroy | 12 May, | 293 |
| **1834** | | |
| "The Carrier-Pigeon" | 16 Nov, | 723 |
| **1844** | | |
| Coningsby | 18 May, | 307 |
| **1845** | | |
| Sybil | 17 May, | 308-9 |
| **1847** | | |
| Tancred | 20 Mar, | 179-80 |

## ELIZABETH GASKELL

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| **1848** | | |
| Mary Barton | 4 Nov, | 708-9 |
| **1850** | | |
| The Moorland Cottage | 21 Dec, | 813-4 |
| **1853** | | |
| Ruth | 22 Jan, | 51-3 |
| Cranford | 23 Jul, | 467-8 |
| **1854** | | |
| Mary Barton | 20 May, | 310 |
| **1855** | | |
| North and South | 21 Apr, | 244-5 |

## CHARLES KINGSLEY

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| **1850** | | |
| Alton Locke | 24 Aug, | 542-3 |

1851

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Yeast: a Problem | 22 Mar, | 180-1 |

1855

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Westward Ho! | 2 Jun, | 341 |
| The Heroes | 29 Dec, | 821 |

## HARRIET MARTINEAU

1833

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| The Parish | 2 Jun, | 341-2 |
| The Parish | 16 Jun, | 373 |
| Cinnamon & Pearls | 8 Sep, | 566-7 |
| Tales of the Tyne | 27 Oct, | 677-8 |

1834

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| The Park & the Paddock | 13 Apr, | 229-30 |
| Scholars of Arneside | 31 Aug, | 549 |

1840

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| General Critical Comments | 12 Apr, | 229 |
| The Hour and the Man | 6 Dec, | 774-5 |

1842

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| The Playfellow | 15 Jan, | 37-8 |

1845

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Forest & Game-Law Tales | 6 Dec, | 772-3 |

1846

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Forest & Game-Law Tales | 17 Jan, | 37-8 |

## WILLIAM THACKERAY

1840

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Paris Sketch Book | 19 Jul, | 451-2 |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| **1841** | | |
| Second Funeral of Napoleon | 17 Jan, | 37 |
| Comic Tales and Sketches | 2 May, | 275-6 |
| **1843** | | |
| Irish Sketch Book | 13 May, | 292-3 |
| **1844** | | |
| Luck of Barry Lyndon | 6 Jan, | 5 |
| **1846** | | |
| Mrs Perkins's Ball | 19 Dec, | 804-5 |
| **1848** | | |
| Our Street | 1 Jan, | 4-5 |
| Vanity Fair | 16 Dec, | 496-71 |
| **1849** | | |
| Great Hoggarty Diamond | 10 Feb, | 85 |
| **1850** | | |
| Rebecca and Rowena | 5 Jan, | 5 |
| **1852** | | |
| Esmond | 13 Nov, | 723-6 |
| **1853** | | |
| English Humourists | 11 Jun, | 372-3 |
| Vanity Fair | 2 Jul, | 422 |
| **1855** | | |
| The Newcomes | 1 Sep, | 548-9 |
| Miscellanies | 3 Nov, | 692 |